

秋月アスカ

アスカ  
秋月アスカ

道果ての  
向こうの光

黄昏の花と咲の騎士



# **Light Beyond**

**– Michi Hate No Mukou No Hikari –**

**- Volume 3 -**

**The Dusk Flower and the Dawn Knight**

**-Author-**

**Akizuki Asuka**

**-Artist-**

**Kishida Mel**

**Shirosaki Saya**

**[ Yumemiru Sekai ]**

# Prologue

What is a miracle?

Sometimes, it might be the glittering stars in a black, night sky, which moves a person's heart.

Sometimes, it might be the flower blooming in the wide desert, which comforts a person's heart.

But in time the night will end and the glittering stars will disappear.

But in time the sand will dance and the colored flowers will be scattered.

It is only the human will that raises a miracle.

Even if one thinks it is lost, they must not give up.

If it is a miracle that cannot be lost, then one must never stop.

Only move forward.

As long as the flickering light beyond the road's end is within sight.

# Chapter One

One person.

Only one person.

-You can choose.

The woman who called him Lord Asyut smiled.

No, no.

I can't possibly choose.

This is madness. The smiling woman in front of me is insane.

-The one person you choose will be saved.

Please don't say anything more, Asyut wished from the bottom of his heart.

He couldn't understand. His mind was unmoving like it was paralyzed.

His feet, which should have been standing on a red carpet, started to tremble and gradually lost their sensation.

It felt like he would collapse there.

-You can't choose?

His throat was dry and scratchy. He couldn't get even a single word out.

The woman looked like she was amused and sad, like a goddess granting mercy- her expression constantly changed.

And still she continued to spin cruel words.

Each one of her words became a sharp blade which attacked and chipped Asyut's soul.

Flickering lamp fire.

Damp air that clung to his skin wetly.

The sound of someone holding their breath.

Even though everything was right beside him, at the same time it felt extremely distant.

Asyut clenched his fists.

Ah, why did it come to this.

At the edge of his blurry vision, his precious sister was standing still, unable to move, and looking like she was hugging herself.

Her largely widened eyes shook without reliability.

It'd be fine, if he could just hug her.

If he could just take her out of here right away.

If he could just rewind time-!!

†

A light, dry sound leapt into his ears and Asyut returned to himself with a snap.

His pen, which fell out of his hand, rolled across the desk dirtying documents with ink right before it dropped to the floor.

He sighed deeply and bent to pick it up before standing up aimlessly from his seat. He went to the drawer alongside the wall and poured himself a cup of water from the jug there before draining it in one gulp. The lukewarm water left an unpleasant sensation in his throat. Asyut furrowed his brows faintly and then set the cup down without any strength.

There was no one other than him in his office. It seemed he spent quite some time sorting documents. By the time he realized it, it was already completely dark in the room, and the lamp placed on his desk swayed unreliably.

Asyut stood still and stared into the darkness.

It was that dream again.

He said that to himself in his mind.

A dream- no, that wasn't a dream. From time to time he was called back to the "reality" of the past. A scene that had not faded at all since that time, and even now tormented Asyut terribly.

Asyut walked, as if dragging his body, to each lamp in the room and turned them on. When he lit the last lamp, he felt like he completed something unbelievably hard. Along with his sigh, he blew out the candle he used to light the lamps with a quick puff. The smell of the tiny smoke which spread stung his nose.

He knew it was already time to finish up his work and return to his personal room. Even he felt that lately he had been accumulating a lot of stress. All the more reason to return to his room quickly and get some rest, he told himself calmly.

But it was obvious that he wouldn't fall asleep were he to return to his room and lay on his bed. Problems, which were unsettled, appeared in his mind one after another, and he couldn't help but consider them. There was the anti-saint faction, the whereabouts of his sister, and- Celiastina. It would have been better if he were thinking about constructive things. However, what appeared and disappeared in his mind was always helpless complaints and pessimistic predictions.

That's why it was easier to immerse himself in work like this for long periods of time instead.

Yes, that was what he thought but...

(.....In the end, no matter where I am or what I do, it's the same thing.)

Asyut shook his head lightly.

At the very least he was going to finish sorting his documents to a point where he could leave them. Telling himself that, he faced his desk again, and when he sat in his chair, his body sunk like a stone into the cushion.

In that moment.

There was a restrained knock on the door of his office.

Asyut raised his gaze, which had dropped to the documents, and he looked at the door.

“Come in.”

He responded in an even voice – as much as possible – so that his exhaustion could not be seen. The person who entered was the servant who received visitors for him.

“Please excuse my intrusion at this time of the night.”

Saying that, he gave a respectful bow.

“What is the matter.”

“Yes, my lord. Sir Aeneas, the Lady Saint’s bodyguard, wishes for some of your time.”

Aeneas. The name made Asyut’s eyebrows dip.

“Is he outside the room currently?”

“Yes, my lord.”

The servant nodded while seeming to look somewhat bewildered. That would be the case, since it was rare for people who weren’t Asyut’s direct subordinates to visit him at his office. Furthermore, it was already an unreasonable time to approach him about work-related matters. Normally, the servant wouldn’t announce visitors to Asyut and would have sent Aeneas away but he was the saint’s bodyguard, therefore even the servant was unable to make a decision.

Asyut nodded lightly.

“I understand. Let him through.”

Most likely it wasn’t a matter about work. It was likely to be a personal matter, which is why Aeneas went out of his way to come at this time. In that case, all the more reason he couldn’t be sent away. –If it was a personal matter from Aeneas then Asyut could roughly guess the subject.

When the servant lowered his head once more, he quickly disappeared past the door.

“Excuse me.”

In exchange, the person who appeared was Aeneas, who entered the room directly with calm steps and a straight back. The air around him was somewhat different from other knights. He had an upright and virtuous atmosphere. He came from a distinguished family whose blood wasn’t second to Asyut’s and- his will, which had no doubts, could be seen in his appearance.

He was wearing a bodyguard's uniform. It was probably impossible to visit Asyut's office in civilian clothes but, above all, the job of being the saint's bodyguard was unrelated to the morning or night. Presently, Aeneas was essentially the only bodyguard, and even now he might have chosen to come here during a break in his work.

Neisan, the other bodyguard, had been released from his duties some weeks ago.

When Asyut and Celiastina had visited the graveyard together, an attack had occurred from the anti-saint faction. There was no mistake that Neisan had been involved in that matter and, naturally, he was arrested in the royal palace and voices were raised about him being thoroughly investigated. However, that did not happen. Celiastina had opposed that intensely. Because she stubbornly insisted that Neisan had searched for the anti-saint faction on her decision, in the end he was discharged as a bodyguard and demoted, which was a relatively generous punishment, and the matter was settled.

However, whether Neisan truly sided with the anti-saint faction or the royal palace-. That still remained unclear.

“I apologize for intruding at this time.”

When Aeneas stood in front of the desk where Asyut was, he gave a perfect bow.

“I do not mind. How about a seat.”

“No, thank you, I will remain standing.”

“.....Well? What exactly is the matter.”

He didn't feel like chatting with Aeneas, and so Asyut cut directly to the chase. It seemed that was Aeneas' intention all along, since he nodded once and started speaking without hesitation.

“It is about Lady Celiastina. I have something I wish to say.”

When the name he expected leapt from Aeneas' mouth, Asyut narrowed his eyes slightly.

“Do you have a report as her bodyguard?”

“No, I do not.”

“I thought so.”

Asyut sighed, a quick breath, and looked away from Aeneas. He lightly clenched his hands which were stretched out on his desk. Aeneas' voice quickly chased Asyut.

“It's a very personal matter, but I thought you would appreciate hearing it, Lord Asyut.”

“.....”

Asyut slowly raised his head. Why was it that Aeneas could make sure of himself with such strong eyes. Though he didn't want to think that he was envious.

“I dearly love Lady Celiastina.”

It was like there were no doubts; it was a voice that carried his core.

“I believe you are already aware of this, Lord Asyut. Of course, I remember the many times that I have been warned up to now. I, myself, understand that these feelings are indiscreet for someone of my standing.”

For the first time, Aeneas grimaced.

“And that these feelings cannot be granted.”

Asyut remained silent and looked up at Aeneas.

“I have also thought that it would be best to stay silent and withdraw. However, in the end, I cannot do that. I cannot give up at all without doing anything.”

“.....”

“Next time, I intend to convey my feelings to Lady Celiastina.”



Aeneas ended his words there and stared down at Asyut, who did not move at all. It was like Aeneas was telling himself that he couldn't avert his eyes here, and that he couldn't show even the slightest doubt.

“And.”

Asyut opened his mouth again, but he was surprised when his voice was lower than he thought.

“What am I going to do?”

“I simply wanted to say this to you. Because I do not want to do something like sneak around.”

“I see.”

Asyut slowly stood up. The two, who were close in stature, faced each other again as an opponent to confront. Whether it was because it could not endure the heavy air drifting between the two, the flame in the lamp on the desk shook and swayed.

“I believe you do not expect encouraging words from me either but- to be honest, I want to shout at you to not screw around.”

“Even so, I will not withdraw.”

In this tasteless room, Aeneas' eyes – as clear as a blue sky without any clouds – seized Asyut. Where did the color of hate towards Celiastina inside of Aeneas go, Asyut wondered absently as he was drawn into Aeneas' blue eyes. Just like himself, it should surely be inside Aeneas too. The terrible hate for Celiastina, and feelings of scorn. Even now he couldn't understand himself. These feelings of care for Celiastina... how pure were they?

–I'll let you choose only one person.

That light voice echoed in his head once again.

Faces in every direction, without color, and everyone was standing still. His sister, frightened and in tears.

A threatening dark impulse of wanting to kill her filled him from the depths of his heart.

(Again.)

Asyut closed his eyes tightly, trying somehow to overcome this disturbance.

It wasn't something to remember right now. He had decided not to connect those events with the current Celiastina. -Yes, he had decided and yet... In the first place, with how he was still bound by the past, he didn't even have the qualifications to face Aeneas like this, right?

What exactly did he want to do.

Indifferent to Asyut's conflict, Aeneas continued with more words.

"If Lady Celiastina were to choose me, and this may be nothing more than just a dream, even so, I am prepared to throw away everything. That is how much I treasure her."

Aeneas' words were absolutely steady.

On the other hand, what about him?

It was painful to face Aeneas. He didn't want to take one step back, but even though he had no intentions to pull back, why wouldn't his heart stop pounding.

"I....."

A hoarse voice escaped his throat.

"I have nothing to say. This talk is over now."

"What do you mean by that. That you could not care less about Lady Celiastina?"

"That is not true."

Asyut glared sharply at Aeneas.

“However, I do not wish to do something as stupid as brandishing my authority to seal your mouth. That is all.”

“.....”

Aeneas pressed his lips together, looking displeased somewhere. But he lowered his head with a stiff movement and turned his back on Asyut without saying anything more. Asyut watched Aeneas' back as Aeneas left before his brows drew together firmly.

Even when he sat down, he did not feel like picking up his pen again.

He leaned his back against the chairback and looked up at the ceiling. Only now did he notice that both his hands shook slightly.

As he thought, it didn't seem like he would be sleeping tonight either.

## Chapter Two

“Wow, it looks amazing on you, Lady Celiastina!”

Yuna, who was standing in front of the full-length mirror in her room, sent a wry smile back at her maid, Nasha, who looked at the mirror and exclaimed in delight.

Right now, Yuna looked more like a fashionable aristocratic lady than a saint who served God. She had on a light pink dress, layered with delicate lace, and a necklace with a large jewel; her makeup was also applied more carefully than usual.

“No, really, for this dress to be worn so splendidly...”

The dressmaker beside Nasha had a wide smile as he said this with admiration.

It was recent that he, an expert dressmaker, made a request to present his own work to the saint Celiastina. In less than a month, when the royal palace gave consent, the dress and the person himself entered the royal palace. And, because he wanted to check if there were any measurements which didn't fit, it became a dress fitting session right there.

“Perhaps it'd be better to tighten it somewhat around the waist.”

“N-No, this is good!”

Yuna hurriedly waved both hands to do her best to not prolong the conversation.

She wasn't used to this.

For Yuna, who was only a village girl, it was unspeakably embarrassing to wear a gorgeous dress and stand in front of people. Yuna did think that it certainly suited Saint Celiastina whose outward appearance was extolled as an absolute beauty. However, due to her indelible nature as a commoner, she could not help but become meek.

“Since everything has been prepared, shall we do your hair as well and not just your makeup? Because you normally keep your hair down, perhaps it would be nice to put

it up."

"No, thank you, this is enough. Really, this is more than enough."

Not wanting to make this into a bigger event she refused Nasha, but her words didn't seem to reach Nasha's ears as she had become completely enthusiastic.

"Once we're done with your hair, we should show the others. Lady Celiastina, you normally wear plain clothes so I'm sure everyone will be surprised at your appearance, dressed up."

"Ooh! That would be lovely!"

Disregarding the person being talked about, Nasha and the dressmaker showed their excitement.

"Oh, I know! The first person should be Lord Asyut. Shall I check whether he has time right now?"

"-N-No!"

Yuna had been drawn along but when a name she couldn't ignore sprang up her voice was unintentionally rough.

"Don't say anything to Asyut, please."

Her voice had become stiffer than she thought. She didn't want to shock the two of them, but when the topic became about Asyut her shoulders naturally tensed. And, sure enough, their eyes widened and they fell silent at Yuna's uncommon anger.

"I'm sorry but, um, Asyut seems to be very busy lately so I don't want to bother him. I'll show off this dress to everyone when a party or something happens. I'd be happier if they were surprised at that time."

"I-I see....."

To Nasha and the dressmaker it was a strained excuse. But it seemed like they understood Yuna's feelings and did not continue with that topic any further.

"Thank you two for your time today. It's the first time in my life I've worn such a pretty

dress. I'll cherish it."

"O-Of course, thank you for your generous words....."

The dressmaker exchanged looks with Nasha and, while having a bewildered expression, he replied and lowered his head.

"Then I will excuse myself here."

"Ah, in that case, let me show you to the gates of the royal palace."

"Much obliged, Miss Nasha. Then, Lady Celiastina, thank you very much for your precious time. If you have need of another dress, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time."

"Yes, I certainly will."

Yuna managed to see him off at the end with a smile. As Nasha left, she turned back with a worried look, but soon Yuna couldn't see her either.

And then, for a while, Yuna stared at the door her guest left through but eventually she sighed and sat in a nearby chair. A beauty with a tired expression was reflected at the edge of the full-length mirror. When she thought about how that image was none other than herself, she felt even more depressed.

Recently, she had been spending her days in her room, rarely leaving.

Celiastina's grand past- she was the one who wished to learn about it, and yet now that she actually knew everything, a dull shock seeped into Yuna little by little.

The mental wounds Celiastina received during her childhood twisted her powers as a saint. Moreover, Yuna herself was not unrelated. Even though Celiastina was screaming soundlessly Yuna, who had been right beside her, didn't notice. She didn't reach out a hand. Certainly, she had been a powerless child but if only she had noticed something at that time; she couldn't help but think this.

She was sure it wasn't just a coincidence that she was connected to Celiastina's life like this. Yuna was now able to have that belief.

She tried to think it was like this... as much as possible.

That's why she thought to devote her remaining time to Celiastina. It wasn't for the sake of an unknown saint, or for the sake of her country, like she had been doing before. It was for "Cella", her past friend, and she hoped that this time she could stop Cella's pain. Yes, that was her decision.

Yuna removed the necklace from her neck with heavy hands. While being careful not to scratch the jewels, she placed it softly into a box. She spent some time spacing out at the table, resting her chin on her hands, but then decided to remove her dress before Nasha returned, and so she sluggishly stood up.

(This dress...)

Nasha had said it as well but it was certainly unusual for her to be dressed in such a gorgeous dress. It was rare for the saint to attend things like balls or showy entertainment, so she had never come across an event requiring her presence where she had to wear a dress like this.

Pinching the hem of her dress, Yuna faced the full-length mirror again.

If Asyut saw her appearance, what would he say? This thought crossed her mind.

(That's why it shouldn't happen, huh.)

Yuna sighed again, her countless one today, and finally took off the dress.

She was well aware of her own feelings for Asyut, who was at times strict, at times kind, and always supporting her from behind. She could no longer lie about these feelings of love for him. However, she knew painfully that she could not show these feelings outwardly.

In Celiastina's body, she wasn't allowed to close the distance with Asyut as Yuna.

And that's why she decided not to have as much contact as possible with Asyut.

Honestly, she didn't want to avoid him obviously. But, when she was beside him, she didn't know what a reasonable distance to keep was. If she was going to be influenced by her own feelings like this, then it was best not to meet him even if it seemed unnatural- that was the answer Yuna came to.

And, indeed, she hadn't seen Asyut face to face recently.

Of course, she participated properly in the ceremonies where the two of them were to be present. But she didn't say any words that were more than what was necessary.

There was no way she could ask Asyut what he thought about this, but she had a general guess without asking. It could be said that the stern expression he showed whenever they met said everything. Asyut probably didn't understand why Yuna was avoiding him at this point in time. Just when they had started to understand each other, why? She was sure he wanted to ask that. But, in actuality, did he say nothing because he respected Yuna's thoughts?

If that were the case then Yuna was both apologetic and grateful. With this extension of time that was allowed to her, she wanted to settle her feelings a little. Although it may be difficult to come to a clear solution, at the very least she had to be able to suppress these emotions.

Finished changing, Yuna kneeled on the floor and picked up a small box from beneath the bed.

When she opened the lid she could see a single ribbon inside.

(Celiastina.....)

This was what she sent to "Cella" in the past as a child. She was extremely touched by how it had been kept even until now.

Yuna gripped the ribbon tightly.

What exactly could she do for Celiastina?

Yuna had done everything up to now with the hope that the royal palace (this place) could become comfortable, even slightly, for Celiastina, who would return. However, before she knew it, hadn't that become "for her own sake"? The more intensely she experienced her feelings for Asyut, the more this anxiety crossed her mind.

These feelings of love for him were undoubtedly Yuna's own. There was no way this could be for Celiastina's sake. And that's why she had to settle herself as soon as possible.

(If I don't, then everything about doing my best for Celiastina's sake would be a lie.)

That was what she was most afraid of. That her very existence would become a lie.

In fact, nowadays, she nearly couldn't feel Celiastina's presence. Even though, at first, when she possessed this body she had been swayed violently by Celiastina's own emotions; the sense of her intense hatred towards the outside world, and the sense of her occasional sorrow. Every feeling had been aligned with Yuna's feelings, and she had felt Celiastina's presence steadily.

But, right now, Celiastina was completely silent.

(Why can't I feel anything anymore?)

Yuna dropped her eyes to the ribbon and frowned.

(Celiastina's heart is... distant.)

Gripping the ribbon in both hands she pressed it against her chest.

Please, Celiastina, you must return.

Nasha, who returned after sending off the dressmaker, seemed sorry to see that Yuna had already changed into her normal clothes, but she immediately switched over her feelings and started cleaning.

"There is still some time after this before your ceremony, will you continue to rest in your room?"

While placing the tea set onto a tray, Nasha only turned her head to ask this.

"Mm... oh, I know, I think I'll drop by the infirmary."

Yuna raised her lowered head and replied in a bright voice.

She'll head to Mislee's infirmary and help out a little- by taking care of the seedling. After she returned the ribbon box to its original place, Yuna had thought this.

Mislee's infirmary was a temporary clinic established by the royal palace. In the past, there was a tragic event where many lives were taken by Celiastina throwing innocent people into a prison called the Holy Jail. Later on, the people who were saved by Yuna were moved to this infirmary and received treatment for a long time.

However, now that that role has ended, it was opened to emergency patients in the royal palace. Mislee, who had been in charge of the infirmary, still remained and treated injured soldiers and servants. Yuna had been absent at the infirmary as she devoted all her time and energy on Celiastina's problem, but now that it was calm, she tried to show up in between her ceremonies.

And, a few days ago, Yuna had personally planted a seedling in the infirmary's backyard. She also took care of it and in these past few days she had been appearing at the infirmary almost everyday. Even though Mislee took on watering it every day, Yuna tried her best to see it frequently herself. It was a plant that was easy to care for, so it would grow properly even if it was treated somewhat roughly, but she thought of it as her avatar, and so she wanted to cherish it.

Yes, that seedling was her avatar.

And it was a present to Celiastina.

The moment she learned that Celiastina had always kept her ribbon close at hand, she also got the idea of wanting to leave behind something for her. The ribbon hadn't been something left behind for Yuna, but it seemed to convey Celiastina's feelings and Yuna had been really happy.

The plant's name was... an asiatic jasmine.

It was the same climbing plant that the young Celiastina had raised in the past at the orphanage. During its season, it would be covered with pale pink flowers and it would soothe the hearts of all who saw it. It might not be as splendid as the one Celiastina raised but that was okay, if it were to make the people who came to the infirmary and Celiastina, who would return, feel even the slightest bit of gentleness when seeing the flowers.

“Oh my, Lady Celiastina, welcome!”

The person that greeted Yuna, who went to the infirmary, was Mislee with her unchanging smile. It seemed she had been airing the place out because she was opening the windows in the room one after another.

“Sorry for always dropping by while you’re busy. Is now a good time?”

“Yes, of course it is. As you can see, there is no one here right now. Even if that weren’t the case, you are always welcome.”

Mislee, who just finished opening the last window, gestured Yuna to a seat when she continued to stand at the entrance. Aeneas, who had escorted her here, remained outside. Even when she invited him inside, he unequivocally chose to wait outside. Whenever she asked the reason, he answered that his position as a bodyguard should not be broken so easily.

Having been told that, she felt awkward about forcibly dragging Aeneas in. However, Yuna secretly thought those words might have been an excuse. Even she knew by now that he had feelings of affection for her. That she came all this way without facing his feelings precisely was because she was at a loss about not hurting him. But she had a terrible guilty conscience about that.

“Aah, but honestly, you arrived at a good time. I had just been thinking about having tea. And, the other day, I was given delicious tea cakes from a servant’s child who I treated. Lady Celiastina, won’t you join me in my break?”

Mislee said that and delivered a light wink, which made Yuna smile and nod.

“I’ll help brew the tea.”

“No, no, it’s fine. I apologize because it is not a high grade tea but, to that extent, it is simple to brew. Please remain seated.”

Saying this, Mislee withdrew into the back; Yuna watched her until she was gone and then slowly looked around the room.

The number of beds was much smaller compared to the time when Holy Jail victims

had been received here. Overall, she felt a refreshing impression. There were different flowers decorating the sides of the beds, most likely from Mislee's consideration. The multicolored flowers received the light of the day through the skylight, and painted the room brightly. All the sheets were pure white, and not a single wrinkle could be found. Even that showed Mislee's sincere personality.

"Lately, it has been quiet like this all the time. There is quite a lot of time when there is no one around. I almost feel like I will be scolded for not doing my job properly."

Mislee returned soon with the tea on a tray.

"However, I try to think about how it is a good thing that everyone is working energetically without injuries or illnesses."

"But that's the truth. If people knew that tasty tea cakes and tea come out here, then everyone throughout the royal palace would gather here."

"Oh my, Lady Celiastina, this is a secret."

The two shared a laugh and then had fun for some time making idle chatter. Mislee wasn't an especially talkative woman, but strangely it was comfortable talking to her. She didn't merely talk about things that she wanted to talk about, but she didn't just listen to the other person either. Because a nice flowing conversation had been created, it all became very natural.

"Come to think of it, today was the day a dressmaker came to visit you, Lady Celiastina, correct? Have you already seen them?"

"Yes, just before I came here. It was a very pretty dress but somewhat embarrassing so I took it off immediately."

"What a waste! I'm sure it suited you very well. And who were the lucky people who saw Lady Celiastina in a dress?"

"No, um, I was only trying it on so it was just Nasha and the dressmaker."

"Oh no, that's even more of a waste! Since everything had been prepared, you should have went out somewhere with Lord Asyut while wearing that dress."

Yuna gave a vague smile upon hearing Mislee's words. Lately, she felt like these fake

smiles she made had increased.

“It’d be nice if we could, but the current situation is how it is.”

“Ah, the problem with the anti-saint faction, hm. I understand, but don’t we all require a break sometimes? Even if you cannot go far, you could try dressing up a little and walk through the gardens of the royal palace together.”

“That’s... true.”

Her reply was stuck and she dropped her gaze to the cup at her hands. For a moment, silence descended between the two.

“.....Lady Celiastina, is your marriage with Lord Asyut hard?”

Mislee broke the silence with one phrase. Yuna’s raised her head up quickly.

“N-Not at all!”

“Then were you treated harshly by Lord Asyut?”

“No, never, that hasn’t happened at all!”

Hmm, Mislee placed her right hand on her cheek and adopted a thinking posture.

“I’m sorry. It’s because you seem to be dispirited lately, Lady Celiastina. I wondered if something had happened with Lord Asyut.”

When Mislee murmured that, Yuna became even more surprised. Was she that easy to read?

“You know, seeing the current you, Lady Celiastina, I remember myself in the past.”

“Your past?”

Mislee nodded with a calm expression.

“About the time I was troubled and could not accept the feelings of my beloved.”

Wha, Yuna’s eyes widened.

“I married when I was seventeen. The marriage was a little early but, thankfully, it was with someone I loved.”

Saying that, Mislee’s eyes grew distant with nostalgia for the past.

“I was very happy. I felt like it was a miracle to have the same feelings as my loved one. Every day was enjoyable.”

Mislee slowly traced the edge of her cup beside her hand. Yuna followed that movement with her eyes.

“But.”

Mislee’s finger came to an abrupt stop.

“During our married life, one concerning problem came up.”

“Problem?”

“.....I couldn’t bear a child. From the start of our marriage, it was a joy for us to talk about anything and everything on the baby we would be blessed with. But, it was no good. Despite our impatience, months swept by and, just like that, ten years passed.”

Ten years. Yuna caught her breath unknowingly.

“I was raised in a village where it was said that bearing a child was a wife’s job. That’s why I was deeply apologetic to my husband and his parents. But everyone was kind. However, conversely, that was also painful. Unable to bear it, I offered to divorce my husband.”

Yuna couldn’t look away from Mislee’s face.

“Because my husband was very kind, he did not accept the divorce. He told me that he wanted to be blessed with a child with me, but if I was not going to be by his side then he did not want a child either.”

“.....What a great husband.”

“Right? I wonder how much those words saved me. But, I was also unwilling to give an inch. I thought that, if there was a possibility that he could separate from me and have

a child with a new wife, then that would definitely be better. I was stubborn. Of course, I also loved my husband at the time and it was really, really painful. Gradually, I was unable to understand what my reason was for refusing my husband's feelings."

A woman's heart is a complicated thing, isn't it? Mislee said with a smile to Yuna.

"Even as someone stood right beside me, supporting me and extending a helping hand, I did my best not to lose to my own heart. I told myself that it would surely be for the other's sake, too. However, I could not completely cast away everything and it hurt."

".....And then, in the end, what happened to you and your husband?"

Yuna timidly urged her on.

"Ah, we divorced."

"What!"

"I will never forget my husband's words at that time. He said "You are wrong. Even if everyone in the world claims your decision was right, I can assure you that you are wrong" to me."

"....."

Yuna was immediately at a loss for words.

".....And, did everything end with you two having parted?"

Mislee slowly shook her head.

"As you can imagine, there is a continuation. After divorcing my husband, I stuck to being alone. I say "stuck to" but a divorced woman who is unable to have a child isn't someone who can remarry. On the other hand, my husband was a divorced ex-husband, but he also did not try to find a new partner. I thought he was being considerate to me, so I left the village I was used to and lived elsewhere, but even still he remained alone. When I realized it, another ten years passed with the both of us remaining alone."

At times Mislee continued her words while chuckling. Seeing her calm appearance, Yuna naturally felt her tension melt.

“In the spring of the tenth year, my ex-husband came to the house where I lived alone, most likely having heard about it somewhere, and proposed to me again. He asked to be together once more and, for some reason, after hearing that the strength in my body left. After ten years, I was finally able to come to an understanding.”

“Then, right now...”

“It’s my second marriage, going on the eighth year. I’m happy.”

“–Amazing!”

To think that Mislee had such a past. She always looked calm, but she had overcome a time of deep wounds, troubles, and suffering– like how Yuna personally was right now.

I see, Yuna thought. And that’s why Mislee was able to guess at Yuna’s distress?

“I do not know what worries you have, Lady Celiastina, so I cannot say anything important-sounding. However, I thought it might help you to know that there are things like this too.”

Mislee smiled widely, her eyes crinkling.

“You know, this world is one where you don’t know what will happen.”

Where you don’t know what will happen– Yuna was reminded of Asyut’s profile, as he looked down, and bit her lip hard.

After, Yuna watered the asiatic jasmine in the backyard of the infirmary and crouched down there, staring absently at the small leaves which swayed in the wind.

(Asyut and I... can’t become like Mislee and her husband.)

Certainly, there were innumerable possibilities spread throughout this world. However, surely there were things that existed which had lines that could not be crossed no matter what. Thinking that much, Yuna let out a small sigh.

In this small backyard, there was only a single large Jume tree growing; then there were stone stiles created with beautiful patterns which lined the ground. After many

years, the asiatic jasmine Yuna planted would also grow large and become familiar in this garden. There was no doubt that the time would come when Celiastina could see that sight.

“Lady Celiastina.”

At that moment, a voice called out from over her shoulder, and Yuna turned around in answer. Aeneas was standing beside the door.

“It is almost time for the Ceremony of Worship. Will you be attending it straight from here? Or shall we return to your room first?”

“Huh, ah, sorry! It’s already that time, huh.”

Yuna stood up and hurriedly swept away the dust which clung to the hem of her one-piece dress with her hands.

“I’m good, let’s go directly from here. Ah, I see I overstayed.”

Taking Aeneas’ hand, when he held it out, she returned to the infirmary. It looked like a single patient had arrived, unnoticed to her, and Mislee was attending to them.

“Ah, sorry, you have a patient. I didn’t notice at all.”

When Yuna lowered her head, the male servant – who was being treated – stared with eyes popping wide.

“I am the one who is sorry I could not do much for you. Please come again whenever you wish.”

Mislee responded with a light tone while bursting into laughter at her patient’s reaction. Yuna nodded once and then left the infirmary; Aeneas followed a few steps behind.

“The infirmary is comfortable, so I accidentally forgot the time.”

When Yuna said this, while just turning her head, Aeneas seemed to smile a little. However, he did not respond with any words and he did not walk beside her.

It was a distance that was only a few steps away. However, that was what was

frustrating.

“U-Um...”

“Yes, my lady?”

Yuna continued talking while walking directly through the straight corridor.

“Uh, I’m sorry for making you even manage my time, Aeneas. In addition to that, you’ve been asked to be my only bodyguard. It must be tough, huh.”

“No, not at all. It is fine.”

Of course she was thankful to hear him say that. But, that answer felt distant somewhere; perhaps, because she was rebellious?

(That’s right. It’s Aeneas, so it’s obvious he wouldn’t answer with anything else.)

Yuna told herself this in self-admonishment.

But still, since the time that Yuna and Asyut went to the orphanage alone together, she felt that Aeneas had been acting strange. Was he angry that she didn’t say anything and left the royal palace? There was no doubt that he would have been anxious about her; it would be natural that his emotions, which had no outlet, might still be smouldering inside him right now.

“.....”

“Lady Celiastina, is something the matter?”

Perhaps a shadow crossed her expression unconsciously, because Aeneas asked that.

“Mm, ah, I mean no. I’m okay.....”

Yuna waved both hands, flustered, and then turned at the end of the corridor.

“Please do not hesitate to say anything.”

“Oh, I was just thinking about how I’ve made you worry over a lot of things, Aeneas. Things like that.”

Ah, I'm an idiot. Yuna hated herself right after she said those words. If she was going to say things halfway like this, then it certainly would have been better not to say anything at all.

Aeneas stopped and blinked as he looked at Yuna's face for a while, before he soon covered his face with his right hand and let out an uncharacteristic "Ah!" noise of shame.

"I apologize. My attitude has not been very well, has it. I am not angry nor am I sad."

"Eh, no, that's not—"

"If anything, you could say I am nervous."

This time it was Yuna's turn to blink.

"Nervous?"

As she returned that question, she noticed that Aeneas' eyes were unexpectedly colored in seriousness. Instinctively, Yuna shrunk away and, in that moment, took a step back. Whether that was a trigger or not, Aeneas suddenly dropped his shoulders and lowered his eyes.

".....No, I apologize, it is nothing."

It happened again, Yuna thought.

Once again, she ran away from Aeneas' feelings. Even though she really didn't want to avert her eyes.

"More importantly, the time for the ceremony is drawing near. The worship room is right over there, shall we go?"

In the end, this time too, Yuna did not ask anything. She only nodded once and resumed walking silently.

The worship room was filled with a solemn quiet.

Several servants worked hard in preparation for the ceremony but, apart from giving greetings, no one spoke. While Yuna went to the wings of the altar, she looked up at the high ceiling. The celestial people in the painting, splendid enough to be overwhelming, danced elegantly without being disturbed by anyone.

In this ceremony, the saint and the First Holy Knight lined up in front of the altar and offered prayers to the God that the leaders of their country followed. It was customary for the main people, Yuna and Asyut, to hold back and wait until the other worshipers gathered. It seemed like Asyut hadn't arrived yet. Yuna felt relieved when she surveyed the room, and then she quietly sat down in a seat that was prepared in the wings.

(I wonder if it's better to talk to Aeneas properly.)

In this tiny space, alone, Yuna thought things over vaguely.

(But what should I say...)

From the start, Yuna was ignorant about matters of love. Amongst the people she knew her age, there were girls who were already married but she thought it was still far in the future for her. And so there was no way she knew of a way to have someone give up on her without hurting them.

(But saying nothing and leaving things vague is cruel, surely.)

However, she hadn't even been confessed to, so how would she broach it. Thinking up to that, Yuna shook her head wildly. Hadn't Aeneas been trying to tell her something just now? But she was the one who ran away.

Right at that moment, she overheard people's voices coming from the altar.

Yuna, who had been worrying endlessly, raised her head and looked in that direction. She couldn't see anything from here, but it seemed like the servants were greeting someone. Then, it was most likely Asyut.

Yuna felt her heartbeat quicken.

She had feelings of wanting to see Asyut, and feelings of knowing that she couldn't see him. Adding on the matter of Aeneas, everything was a mess. In this situation, if she were to face Asyut, she didn't think she could act natural. He should be waiting in the wings opposite of her, but in the case that he came over here, what exactly should she

do?

(I'm a complete mess.)

For a while, Yuna pulled her shoulders in with nervousness and peeked at the altar, but in the end Asyut didn't show his face over here. There was something like relief and something like loneliness- but they were mainly selfish thoughts, and even she herself knew that.

Eventually, many footsteps began to resound in the area, and the voices of people chatting quietly increased. The participants in the ceremony had gathered. In this ceremony, where punctuality was strictly observed, everyone was quick to be quiet again. And in this moment, as usual, the noises from the altar disappeared like fog in a short amount of time, and once again a painful silence descended.

Receiving her cue, Yuna prepared to walk to the front of the altar. She stood up from her seat and slowly took in a deep breath. She also closed her eyes tightly, trying not to think about anything unnecessarily. And then, opening her eyes again, she felt her feelings settle just by a little bit.

Taking one step out, Asyut appeared on the opposite side doing the same, and he sent a glance at Yuna. For a second, their eyes connected, and then immediately separated. Yuna headed to her seat as calmly as possible and, without exchanging a single word with Asyut, the gentle prelude music began to start playing, signaling the start of the ceremony.

# Chapter Three

The next morning, a letter was delivered to Yuna who was having breakfast in her room.

It was an exceedingly fine-looking envelope, with an imposing wax seal. Because the messenger purposefully carried it to her on a golden tray, she could tell that the letter came from someone of status. However, for Yuna, who hadn't received a letter in this life up to now, she had no idea who the sender could be.

In any case, nothing would start if she didn't open it.

Finshing her breakfast and drinking her after meal tea, Yuna placed her cup on the table and then took the envelope in hand.

She carefully opened the seal – it would be a waste to destroy such an elaborate and delicate wax seal – and took out a single card from within. When she looked at its contents, a simple sentence was written in very beautiful handwriting.

–Won't you join me for lunch today in my garden?

That was all. However, before she could dodge the invitation, the signature attached to the end struck Yuna dumb.

Ronbarno Sibelius.

“Ah..... this is...”

Sibelius. The person who was allowed to call themselves by the name of the country was...

“T-T-T-The... king?”

At her trembling murmur, Nasha who was preparing another cup of tea beside her stopped her hands.

“Eh? It came from the king?”

“Ronbarno Sibelius... it says. W-What do you think?”

“.....That it is undoubtedly... from the king...”

“.....”

For the time being, Yuna returned the card back into the envelope. But, she wasn't able to do even that well with her mind having gone blank.

Why, why, why. Only a question mark ran around in her mind. Why was it now that the king of the country decided to call out to her. Was there some sort of problem? No, she's surely sent more than enough problems his way through the days up to now, but, why now so suddenly.

“Um, was something quite serious written in there?”

Nasha, who seemed to feel that Yuna's dumbfounded state was unusual, asked that question reservedly.

“No, um, yeah. He asked if I wanted to eat lunch together with him today.”

“Oh my, it was a meal invitation.”

Nasha relaxed her shoulders, as if she were relieved, and smiled. Looking at that smile, Yuna tried to regain her calm somehow. That's right, it shouldn't be strange for the king to invite the saint to a meal. Their positions were different, but the two of them stood at the top of this country. It might even be an important job to meet face-to-face and interact from time to time.

—However, up to now, there hadn't been an opportunity like this at all.

And so, like she thought, something abnormal must have happened.

“W-What do I do.”

“What to do... For example?”

“I’m guessing I can’t not go.”

“Eh!? You’re going to refuse!?”

Nasha’s eyes turned round and her voice became high.

“Right, that’s impossible, huh.”

“N-No, I wouldn’t know.”

What should she do.

No matter how long she thought about it alone, she made no progress.

In these times-.

“So, you’ve come to me again?”

Linus, who seemed to be straightening up his documents in his room, greeted Yuna with an apathetic look.

“In these times, Celia, you’re supposed to go to Asyut and not me. There is no man who would be displeased to be relied upon by his fiancée.”

He was saying that because he knew it was hard for Yuna to go to Asyut.

“But Asyut always seems to be busy so.....”

“I’m busy too, maybe you can tell by looking.”

Tap, tap. Linus knocked on a pile of documents with the tip of his pen. Oops, Yuna’s words were stuck. It’s true his desk was buried under documents, boxes, and things that Yuna wasn’t able to understand.

“Oh well, I’m certain that he has his hands full with his own problem right now.”

Was Linus implying that the problem was her? Feeling uncomfortable, Yuna straightened her sitting posture without reason.

“And so, King Ronbarno has invited you to a meal?”

“Mhm. In and of itself this might not be unusual but this sort of thing is my first time. I’m worried that something happened.....”

Linus took the presented letter and read it through before returning it to Yuna immediately.

“There’s not much to worry about. The reason the king and saint do not meet often is due to the political problems involved. That he is calling out to you amongst all this is a sign that “something” has started to move. Perhaps he is thinking that he needs to talk to you once.”

Yuna shifted on the sofa, feeling unsatisfied.

Was the “you” that Linus spoke of in this situation Celiastina, or...

“The king is aware, right? Um, that I’m not the real Celiastina.”

“Aa, of course.”

That’s what she thought. There was no way the king would not know about the serious matter of there being a completely different person inside the saint.

In other words, the king was wanting to talk to “Yuna”.

(.....Uwah.)

The more she thought about it the more preposterous she felt it was. Because Yuna was just a simple former village girl. She didn’t have any special knowledge or education, and so she didn’t think she was very qualified to talk to the king of the country. Even doing so as Celiastina would have been a bit better. But this time she was being told that it was not so.

“Didn’t I say you don’t have to be so worried and everything will be alright? The king is, well, a bit strange but not a terrifying person. Even if you were to make small blunder, he won’t eat you.”

“M, Mm.”

It would be nice if it ended on just a small blunder.

“So, accept your fate and go.”

Linus waved a hand and showed an iron smile that would not allow any further words to be spoken. She wanted to snap at that merciless attitude, but thinking more on it, it would be the person seeking mercy from him who was mistaken. Yuna gave a small sigh and looked out the window. In the deepest depths of this royal palace, the king who she hadn't seen yet was waiting for her.

†

The king's room, which she passed through, wasn't that much different from her own room.

There was a difference in atmosphere between a man and woman's room, but in general the size of the room itself did not change much – rather this one seemed smaller. Thinking about it, Yuna received extraordinary treatment as the saint, so perhaps it wasn't strange for her room to be at the same standard as the king's room.

However, this room seemed to be the king's private room for guests. It seemed like his bed and other such things had been set up in an entirely separate private room. She saw now that the refined furniture and fresh flowers were probably perfectly designed to make someone feel welcome.

That Yuna was able to look around this room without reservation was because the owner was absent. The main point – the king – could not be seen anywhere. When she asked about that, the maid that was guiding her gestured to a glass door at the back of the room while staying respectfully attentive.

“Beyond that door is a garden exclusive to this room; the king is waiting there already.”

Past that door! Yuna felt her heart leap, but she couldn't be seized with fear and stand here forever. Following the maid, who had started walking towards the garden, Yuna strengthened her resolve and took a step.

The moment the door opened, the soft and fluffy scent of flowers teased her nose.

There was a colorful flower arch. Beyond that gentle curve, there was a single table with a dazzlingly white cloth on top. The table had already been prepared and there were at least two people who stood to the side, postures straight.

And then in the center was- a man, around sixty years old, who was seated calmly. He had a quiet manner and showed an amiable smile.....

Yuna's mouth dropped open.

"Ro-, Ro, Ron!?"

In the next instant, before she noticed, she had shouted that out.

What exactly was going on.

At this outrageous shock, she was unable to say anything more. The person who was seated in the king's seat, who she should have been meeting for the first time, was an unexpected acquaintance, and so it would have been crazy not to be surprised.

(This can't be, b-but...)

It was unmistakable. He was that Ron who saw Yodel off on her departure with her. That person who appeared in unexpected places and at unexpected moments, was full of mystery, but also the one who encouraged her and gave her back a gentle push.

"W-Why is Ron... ah, wait a minute, you mean you're the king."

Her confusion was so great that Yuna stood still in her spot, flustered. Ron looked at Yuna with a gentle smile that hadn't changed from that time.

"Well, first, let's take a deep breath and calm down. And won't you take a seat?"

"Eh, uhm, huh?"

She couldn't understand the meaning in Ron's words.

"I apologize sincerely for shocking you. That wasn't my intention..... hm, maybe it was a little."

While chuckles slipped out of his smile, Ron stood from his own seat and guided Yuna

to hers. Even when she looked up at Ron, who stood immediately beside her, she didn't think there was any difference with him from the previous time they spoke together.

“T-The king.....”

Ron was the king. The king- ah, she saw now.

Deep in Yuna's mind, something dropped with a thump.

That was why he could stand on the terrace without anyone questioning him on the day Yodel went on her journey. That was why he was able to stand alone in the garden in front of the saint's personal rooms, where even the average aristocrat could not enter.

(I see.....)

Once she accepted it, she felt like she was able to understand everything, to the point where she wondered why she hadn't noticed it until now. It was because he was the king- honestly, she should have realized that sooner!

“Now, since you're here, let us eat before the dishes are cool. After all, we can talk while we're eating.”

Ron said this with amusement. Taking his seat again, he toasted Yuna with an aperitif. Under his invitation, she put it to her mouth and the coolness down her throat finally made Yuna feel herself again.

“To introduce myself again, my name is Ronbarno, the king of this country. We've spoken to each other on many occasions up to now, but please excuse how I did not divulge my identity. I apologize for my rudeness.”

“N-No, not at all, y-you did no such thing.”

Was she being polite enough? A sweat she didn't understand well traveled down her back.

“Um, Your Majesty, I apologize deeply on my part. That is, until now, I have been terribly impolite.....”

“Nonsense, please do not worry about that.”

Ron smiled widely like a good-natured old man. Placing down his glass of aperitif, he clapped his hands once.

“Okay, with this, let’s call it even between us. Why don’t we throw away our statuses as king and saint, because it would please me to talk to you without hesitation like we did before. Please call me Ron as well.”

“B-But—“

“But, because, however— let’s drop those. Although, of course, you have the right to blame me for hiding my identity.”

“I can’t do such a thing as blaming you.”

“That you and I have spoken many times is actually something that even my aides know very little about. Because it is understandable that meeting with you in person would cause trouble. And that is why I thought it best not to divulge my identity.”

“I-Is that so.”

“Well, it’s true that I also thought this way would let you talk to me without hesitation. Oh, dear me, I am a dishonest person.”

“Not at all.....”

Yuna hurriedly shook her head.

At that point, the waiters brought over the meal. Fresh vegetable salad, rich and warm soup, and grilled chicken that overflowed with juices when stabbed with just a fork. While they ate their entire meal, they continued with idle and leisurely chatter. It was mainly Ron who spoke.

On the other hand, Yuna couldn’t help but shrink. Ron had said to throw away their statuses, but was she really allowed to talk to him carefreely? After all, to Yuna, the king was someone who was so high up in the clouds that he couldn’t even be seen. That right now she herself was the saint who had a status comparable with the king was another problem in and of itself.

Ron, who seemed to notice how timid Yuna was, showed a troubled smile.

“In the end, is it impossible? Can you not trust an old man who hid his identity?”

“Y-You are mistaken. That’s not it at all.”

“You know, Lady Celiastina, we each have a plain and simple status that is expressed by one word: “King” and “Saint”. However, when placed beside each other we are in a complicated position. I, who stands at the top of this country in a political position, and you, who stands at the top of this country in a religious position. Then, without making a distinction between politics and religion, if there is a question of which one is greater, even now I do not actually have an answer to that.”

That is why the opportunity for us to talk face to face is quite hard to come by, is what Ron said. Before she came here, when she dropped by, Linus had mentioned this kind of thing too.

“But I’ve always thought of the king as being greater.”

Unintentionally, Yuna, as a commoner- Yuna spoke her own thoughts. To the general public, they thought the king was the greatest in the country. However, remembering that she herself was a person related to the current problems, Yuna hurriedly closed her mouth to stop from talking as if it were somebody else’s problem. Even if it was okay since Ron seemed to know her true identity, there were waiters around them who knew nothing.

Ron, who seemed to understand the meaning of Yuna’s panic, dismissed all the servants after they finished pouring the after meal tea. With this, the two of them were completely alone. Yuna gave a sigh of relief. Whenever she spoke with Ron, her real thoughts always seemed to be pulled out. And she was uneasy about other people’s opinions of their conversation.

“The king is greater, hm? Well, certainly, most people would think that. However, that’s not stated clearly anywhere and, in recent years, the influence of the priests has grown. It is a fact that the “saint” has been increasingly raised higher and higher.”

What did Ron himself think about that? Yuna quietly looked at Ron, as if she were searching him. Ron immediately noticed that gaze and, once again, smiled at Yuna.

“There are not many people who can answer this issue. And, before the trouble comes to a head, everyone is trying their best to keep us away from each other... which is why I thought to prepare a “spokesperson”.”

“A spokesperson?”

Yes, Ron nodded.

“What exactly is the “saint”? Why do they exist? Are they really beings who should be revered as pillars of the country?..... When Lady Celiastina herself appeared as the saint, I thought this would be an opportunity to reveal these questions that had smoldered in me for a long time. I allowed her to continue doing as she pleased as much as I dared. And then I waited and used this passage of time as my spokesperson to address everyone.”

Yuna couldn’t understand why Ron was interested in talking about this now. Wasn’t this topic too grand for her to be able to accept? But, perhaps it was like Linus said about “something” having started moving, that Ron had decided to speak with Yuna. If that were the case, even if she couldn’t grasp this topic, she would stay quiet and lend her ear to his talk. Yuna decided on this.

“Do you not think the business of being a king is quite easy to understand? A person with power stands at the top of this country and using that power governs the country. If the king is seen as being inadequate, someone else with power would drag them down out of that seat..... and this continues on and on. However, the saint is different. The saint is an unclear existence whose very identity has been recognized by “God”. Perhaps it is because I am in the position of a king that I have always thought about this completely different existence standing beside me.”

What exactly was the saint? Why did they exist? Yuna dropped her eyes to her hands and stared at them.

“It may be because I am a contrary person but, in actuality, I do not really like this history of everyone worshipping this being called a saint. Certainly, to people who live every day, I understand it is important to have an existence to rely upon. But the saint should not be different from a normal human. These women had their own way of living- perhaps, did they not?”

Did you know? Ron continued to press for an answer.

“Most of the majority of these generations of saints have spiritually and mentally suffered in their life at the royal palace. They were given luxurious rooms, luxurious clothes, and ate luxurious meals. And, as long as it was within the law, they were able

to do whatever they wanted. Yet, why were these women not happy?..... I believe I do not need to explain this for you to understand, right.”

Yuna nodded in silence. Yuna herself had thought about her own body compared to the past saints.

“I think the saint is a slave of the country. In this long history, they have never been released.”

Ron’s calm composure did not collapse at any point, which was why she could not tell if he were angry, lamenting, or caught by another emotion.

“Ron, do you wish to free the saint from the country?”

Yuna could not suppress the question that arose in her heart, and said it. Ron blinked multiple times, and then breathed out while shaking his head with a smile.

“No, no, I am not such a good person. I might have chosen words that are nothing but pretty. To say it clearly, I want to remove the influence of the saint and priests. For that purpose, I have used this existence called Lady Celiastina. Her unprecedented behavior has exposed in broad daylight the meaning behind this existence called a saint, the perversion of worshipping the saint, and the dangers of religious authority.”

“That’s.....”

“A despicable method, right. But, you are correct- only...”

Ron’s words ended there, and then once again he turned straight to Yuna.

“I feel like a new path is being opened right now, overcoming all the expectations and predictions that I had. By your hands.”

“Me?”

“Yes. Lady Celiastina’s future, which I had imagined on my own, held nothing but ruin. However, your existence is remaking the future that should have been determined. Ever since I realized that, I have been watching – with a different feeling – over Lady Celiastina..... you. Where we go from here, may be up to you.”

“I.....”

Yuna tried to say something but was unable to find her words and closed her mouth. Ron, who was watching Yuna, suddenly raised his head and squinted his eyes at the sunlight that poured down. When Yuna followed his gaze, the white clouds flowed leisurely across the expansive blue sky.

“Right now, once again, a large wave has been born. -The anti-saint faction’s last uprising will soon occur. I know this. Actually, even if it occurs, it would not be difficult at all to suppress it. However, the people are watching this uprising against the “saint”, and it is a great shock to the country’s people that there exists people who would risk their lives to challenge the saint. Even if they can be easily suppressed, the public’s view towards the saint and priests would become severe.”

Ron’s smile withdrew and, instead, he looked at Yuna with serious eyes.

“Of course, voices will be raised to criticize me as well. But to me that would be easy to work with.”

Because he could fulfill his responsibility of strictly controlling the priests and saint-is that what he meant.

“Then, does this mean you are hoping for the anti-saint faction’s uprising?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“.....But, if the anti-saint faction’s people are caught, they’ll receive punishment, right.”

“It will undoubtedly be capital punishment.”

“That’s...”

Aah- why was it like this. Why was it so difficult to find a path for everyone to be happy? Duo and Yodel appeared in her mind’s eye. Duo, who risked his life to get revenge on the saint. Yodel, who tried to drive Duo to a death penalty and fan the flames of people’s anger to crush the saint.

(It’s the same. The exact same thing is going to be repeated.)

Despite changed eyes, and changed times.

She was always powerless.

"I, as the king, am hoping for the anti-saint faction's uprising and..... no, that is all."

Ron quietly continued.

"Just- there certainly exists a part of me that thinks what will happen in the future may be up to you."

Yuna looked back directly into Ron's eyes. His words slowly bled into her chest; little by little, little by little, into Yuna who could not move. She may not have the right or power to deny the path he chose.

But.

Yuna stood up without averting her eyes from him.

"I don't know what's best for the fate of the being called a saint, or the future of this country."

She also couldn't be arrogant enough to claim that the path she chose was the best.

"But I think there has to be other ways to do things."

Yuna clenched her fist strongly.

"I'm sorry for saying something arrogant. But I cannot support you, Ron. I want to go down the path that I believe in. Even if someone finds fault with that, I will continue to move forward- until the last moment."

†

A gust of wind blew through the gardens after she left. The plants and vegetation swayed greatly and made rustling noises. As if the flowers were whispering to each other, wondering what was going to happen now- Asyut felt this.

"I do not mind if you come out now."

A calm voice, its state not having changed, called out to him like that.

Asyut stood from where his back was leaning against the wall, and slowly walked over to the owner of that voice. Without turning around to the evenly paced footsteps

stepping on the grass, the king had just raised his cup of tea, which had already gone cold, to his mouth.

“I appreciate the trouble you went through, standing for such a long time, Asyut. If you would like, please sit down in front. The dishes haven’t been cleared, but I believe you don’t mind that, correct?”

The king smiled, finally turning to look at Asyut who came up immediately beside him.

“.....What are your intentions, having made me wait there.”

Asyut sat in front of the king, as suggested, without losing his stern expression. Originally, he would have definitely declined once, but right now that etiquette was annoying. In the first place, the other person’s nature wasn’t concerned about this, and on this occasion he would not mind either.

“I was thinking that I wanted you to hear everything as well.”

“Your feelings on politics and religion, or your information on the anti-saint faction’s attack?”

“Both of them.”

“.....”

“You will need to be well-prepared as well. Because the path that I choose, and the path that child will go on- will soon cross. And I believe you will be accompanying us, right.”

Asyut pressed his lips together tightly.

“Of course, I am aware that you are in a difficult position, since from the start, the First Holy Knight, although my direct subordinate, is a position that was expected to be like a bridge between the royal family and the priests. Conversely, this is exactly why you will have to work hard from here on. I do not wish to expel the priests, I simply need them to follow under me.”

“For that reason, you are spurring on the anti-saint faction. Is that what you are saying?”

The king raised one eyebrow and closed his mouth.

“I have questions about what you said, just now. –You have some sort of connection to the anti-saint faction, don’t you.”

“Oh?”

The king’s smile deepened even more.

“Why do you think that?”

“At the very least, someone from the anti-saint faction is one of your people, no? That is why you speak like you “know” the anti-saint faction’s attack will happen soon, and “hope” for their uprising.”

“I see.”

The king spread out both hands and tilted his head.

“You have not changed since the past, hm, to point out something like me, the king, having a connection to the anti-saint faction. I do not believe you have forgotten that that fastidiousness has brought hell to you in the past.”

Asyut’s expression didn’t change, but the hands placed on his lap clenched strongly.

“.....If you just wished for me to hold my tongue, you would not have called me over here.”

“Hm, that is correct. I do not mind if you say everything in your mind.”

“King Ronbarno.”

In contrast to the king who was calm through and through, Asyut’s tone hardened as he called out that name.

“There should not be any connection between the leader of this country and the insurgents of this country. If this is known to our surroundings, even your course of actions may be affected.”

“Oh my, Asyut.”

The king blinked, as if he had said something greatly unthinkable.

“I have not said one word about being hand in hand with them. Even if, by any chance, a spy was sent with my backing, I do not believe that constitutes as a betrayal.”

“That.....”

Certainly might be true. However, he had said clearly that he was waiting eagerly for the anti-saint faction’s uprising. Not being fully satisfied was a pressure on Asyut’s chest.

“At any rate, the anti-saint faction’s attack is no longer avoidable. And it doesn’t appear like your fiancée will watch in silence. You should be very careful that that adorable girl is not hurt from carelessness.”

“.....Are you going to use even Lady Celiastina as your tool?”

“No, no.”

The king’s shoulders shook as he laughed.

“Since earlier, you have been treating me as an incarnation of evil. At the very least, I really like that young lady. Always eager and lovable. While watching her, I know for the first time now, that some things can be changed with earnestness. If I were thirty years younger, I believe I would not hand her over to you.”

“Please do not joke.”

“Was that a joke?”

Looking at his smile, Asyut could not see into his heart. And that was why, no matter how many questions he asked, or answers he was granted, he had never been satisfied up to now.

–But, only this, he could not help but ask.

“May I ask one more thing?”

“I do not mind.”

“Just now, Lady Celiastina said “Until the last moment”. What did she mean?”

In that instant, he felt as if the teasing light in the king’s eyes disappeared. However, the king immediately lowered his eyes, and Asyut could not confirm that.

“Now.....”

The king slowly shook his head.

“Hm, did she say such a thing?”

And then he reached for the cup again, and carried it to his mouth leisurely.

†

Asyut, who had left the king’s private rooms, walked down the corridor at a quick pace, feeling irritated.

At times, the civil officials he passed glanced at him, wondering what happened, but Asyut paid them no attention. He heard that he always had a serious look on his face.

More importantly, what exactly was the king intending to do?

For as long as he could remember he served King Ronbarno and, no matter how much he couldn’t read the other’s heart, he thought he was generally able to understand most things; such as how the king didn’t quite like the rise of the priest faction, and that he welcomed the anti-saint movement– In other words, Asyut knew those.

However, he did not know the king’s true purpose in talking to him in such a way.

Even Asyut had not considered that the king had sent a spy to the anti-saint faction. He had said he was not in an alliance with them, but how much could Asyut believe that? Furthermore, Asyut was unable to understand why the king spoke to Celiastina about the movements of the anti-saint faction.

What was the king seeking from her? In addition to that, right now, she was dealing with a large problem. Asyut didn’t want her to suffer by bearing even heavier burdens.

–Yes, Asyut had noticed that Celiastina had some sort of problem. Recently, her attitude was strangely awkward. To be more specific, she was clearly avoiding him.

And was that not related to the “problem” too?

In that case, what was the problem.

As long as she did not tell him, he wasn’t clear on what it was. But Asyut felt like he could vaguely see the answer inside him.

He had asked the person herself in the past.

Lady Celiastina, are you saying the moment you regain your memories, “you” will disappear? – is what he asked.

It was like an obscure anxiety. Even while thinking it was ridiculous, it was an expansive terror that couldn’t be erased.

Was Celiastina and “her” a completely different person?

He wondered when he started to think such a thing. It wasn’t like there was any clear evidence. Simply, during the long time he’s interacted with her, that thought naturally arose in his mind. Those cold eyes with mercilessly reaped the lives of the innocent, and those direct eyes which wept with feelings for those who were hurt, being the same person... that surely couldn’t be possible, is what he thought.

–However, that might just be something he wanted to think.

He couldn’t meet her, and she wouldn’t tell him anything; there was a part of him which was in pain just from that. Before he knew it, she had become a very large existence to Asyut. To an extent where he was distinctly aware that he didn’t want to lose her, this irreplaceable existence.

However, for a long time, Celiastina had been a torturous existence for Asyut. Even now, the antagonism of the distant past raised its head inside Asyut’s heart. He wasn’t able to forget. Asyut was sure that, in this life, he would remember everything that happened between him and Celiastina.

And that was precisely why he wanted the past Celiastina and the present her to be

different people.

In the end, was that the “truth” or nothing more than Asyut’s “desire”?

If it was the truth, then the meaning of the words that Celiastina said just now, “Until the last moment”-.

Once he thought that, the idea would not leave his head. Celiastina hadn’t admitted it, but she hadn’t denied it either. Following this, the idea in Asyut began to change into a conviction.

He wondered if Celiastina intended to continue saying nothing like this. Was it nothing more than optimism to think that she would eventually put things in order and disclose everything to him? If he just waited, she would go to a place where he could no longer reach her. -This premonition wouldn’t stop.

Asyut’s chest tightened violently as he had a bad feeling while thinking this.

A chill ran down his back and his body trembled. And right at that moment.

He accidentally knocked shoulders with someone who was probably passing by just now. Surprised, he turned around and saw that the person who called out to stop him was Celiastina’s guardian, Linus. He was holding documents in his hands and most likely was on the way back from a meeting somewhere. However, they did not have a relationship where they would make light talk in the hallway if they saw each other, and so Asyut could not hide his confusion.

“What’s wrong, Asyut. You have more wrinkles between your brows than usual.”

As if not knowing the tact, Linus carefreely used his index finger to trace the space between his own eyebrows.

“No, it’s nothing.”

Asyut’s words naturally became evasive.

“Did the king push unreasonable demands on you again and made your stomach hurt?”

“.....”

Did this man know that just now he had been summoned by the king? Otherwise, Linus wouldn't have called out to him, no?

"How much do you—"

Know exactly. He was about to ask that unconsciously, but closed his mouth. The other person was someone who was as equally unreadable as the king. He didn't think he would receive a decent answer if he asked.

Linus leaned slightly against a window frame in the corridor and shrugged his shoulders.

"You are suitably troubled as well, hm. Have things not been going well with Celia lately?"

At the name of the person who he had been thinking about right now, Asyut's body started a little.

"That girl has also appeared quite depressed. I thought she had a fight with you, but apparently it doesn't seem like such an easy problem."

"....."

Not an easy problem— that was certainly true. However, how much of a deep-rooted problem was it? Celiastina would not disclose anything to him. And he was sure not in the future either—

"She will not allow me to share her pain."

Asyut murmured that unknowingly. At that, Linus' eyes widened slightly and he kept silent.

"Why does she try to carry everything alone? I don't understand."

".....I'm sure she's not taking "everything" upon herself. I think she trusts you more than enough. She simply hasn't opened up about the main thing."

"Which is what I want to know."

Asyut spat that out, frustrated. Even though he knew it didn't help to say such a thing

to Linus, but he couldn't stop.

"If I'm not told anything, isn't that the same thing as knowing nothing?"

"But, you see, isn't it very difficult to expose everything to someone? There are things which we can't say because we are thinking about the other."

He thought he was only going to obtain an answer that was wrapped in smoke, but unexpectedly Linus responded to Asyut's reckless words directly.

"Of course, whether that is really for the other or not is another problem. But the person themselves thinks that. That the best way is to not say anything until the very end."

Until the very end--.

Asyut's heart started to shake again.

"Lord Linus."

Linus, whose name was called anew, raised an eyebrow slightly.

"You know, don't you. The relationship between the past Lady Celiastina and the present Lady Celiastina. Is it true that these two are completely different people?"

"That is not a question I can answer."

Linus cut his question down completely.

"Conversely, Asyut, I would like to ask you a question. If the past and present Celiastina were the same person, unchanged, then what exactly would you do? Would you not forgive what had happened up to now and thrust her away? Or, would you go back on the cordial time you spent together and verbally abuse her harshly?"

-He felt like he was bathed in ice water.

Asyut was at a loss for words and stood there stiffly.

"The events in your pasts..... no, we may not be able to call it the "past" yet. Because the matter with your younger sister hasn't been concluded yet. This problem may

make you suffer even more from here on. But even still, are you able to accept the present Celiastina?"

Linus stopped his words there and dropped his eyes to his feet. But he soon raised his head.

"There is new information regarding your sister that I must tell you. -Right now, she is with the anti-saint faction."

Asyut pressed his lips flat and took a long hard look at Linus' face.

"I think there was a rumor about that before, but we couldn't find out if that was the truth until now. However, lately that has been made clear. By the king's order, we made the necessary arrangements to rescue her in secret, but it ended in a failure. The king has decided to discard her."

"When... did....."

"It was not that long ago. It has been relatively recent that the king was able to get an "eye" inside them. Necessary information is coming to us from there, but we're not able to pull strings from this side yet."

"....."

The tips of his fingers grew cold. That scene, which attacked Asyut on countless occasions, came back to his mind again. Milifaire, his precious sister. That face, which still held traces of youth, was frozen with fear- he could only remember her face at that time.

At the same time, Celiastina's figure came to mind. Her gentle smile, which he should have become used to seeing now, had disappeared and in its place a wooden expressionless face, like a mask, was stuck on.

"Do you understand the reason the king gave up so quickly on Milifaire? She is not a "trapped princess". Far from that, she has become a member of that organization on her own. Meaning she is fighting against the royal palace. Even the king won't extend mercy to a rebel."

Linus straightened his body which had been leaning on the window frame and slipped past Asyut.

“It seems harsh, but you too should be prepared– about many things.”

And then he walked away slowly. Asyut was unable to stop him, and only looked at that back.

# Chapter Four

The sunlight, which seemed to pierce, shone mercilessly on the young lady's back.

While gritting her teeth, the young lady carried a basket on her slender shoulder and walked at an even, unbroken pace. When she finally reached the building that was her goal, she opened the door with her body and dropped the basket she had been carrying with a thump. At that impact, an undersized fruit rolled out of the basket which was full of vegetables. It rolled to another young person. A muscular body bent to pick up the fruit and then, while throwing it into the basket, he gave a deep sigh.

"How many times have I said that you don't need to do this kind of work, Mille."

"And I've said many times that I'll do it, even if you tell me not to, Jin."

The young lady, called Mille, gave a chilly glance at the tall man before she poured water into a cup from the water jug beside her and drank it all at once.

"What's the plan today?"

"Everyone has their own work. We won't be gathering today."

"I see."

While saying that, the young lady made to go out again.

"Hey, wait. Where are you going this time?"

"The well. There's not a lot of water in the jug, so I'm going to draw some."

The man roughly mussed up his short-trimmed hair.

"I've said you don't-....."

"Didn't you tell me to do whatever I wanted. Or am I not free to go and draw water from the well?"

“We’re not talking about what you’re free to do. It’s something more different, like what you’re asked for—“

“Once I’m done drawing water, I’m going to do maintenance on the weapons.”

Waving a hand, the young girl disappeared beyond the door. The man folded his arms and clicked his tongue.

“It’s not about that either. You know what I’m talking about, Lady Milifaire.”

Milifaire stopped by the storeroom when she left the house and pulled out an empty bucket. Carrying it in both hands, she walked quickly on a paved road. Just then she had been acting fine, but in reality her shoulder hurt a bit. She frowned at how, as expected, what she had been carrying had been too heavy.

She was here on her own will.

Milifaire always took the initiative to act, in order to show that she wasn’t a trapped princess, but an individual with their own will. Having that will, she belonged to the organization called the anti-saint faction.

And that’s why, like everyone else was doing, she usually tried to earn money properly with work – as expected, since she couldn’t work publicly, she had to do inside work like embroidery – and living in a hideout she did the cleaning, laundry, and cooking. At first, because she was a young lady who couldn’t do even that, she only held back others when she offered her help. However, now she could be proud of being a person “of use” in itself.

“Still, in the end, heavy things are heavy.”

Filling the bucket to the brim with water, Milifaire lifted it up with great force. Before, she could scarcely even pull up the well bucket with the well’s rope, but she had improved greatly since then. The day would come soon when she had a weapon instead of a bucket or basket, but she didn’t find that scary. Rather, she wished for that. Because the only thought kept in her heart was risking her everything to fulfill her revenge.

“.....”

When she raised her head, the blue sky didn't have a single cloud as usual, and the sun shone brilliantly. As she exchanged greetings with familiar faces she passed by on her road home, she felt the word "revenge" was terribly hilarious. Yes, her life right now was extremely quiet and calm. To a point where she was confused as to whether this was okay or not.

It wasn't like this at the beginning.

In those days when she exited the palace, wandered on the roadside, and was at last given shelter. She had been taken to a hideout in a back alley, where people with guilty consciences looked like they would gather, and was confined in a dungeon. They told Milifaire, who didn't understand anything that was happening, that they were the "anti-saint faction"— an organization formed to avenge themselves against Saint Celiastina. In that shape, they stood before her then and declared that. They provided clothes and meals, and never harmed her, but for a while Milifaire did not feel alive.

The days passed with her frightened and wondering if she would be killed. But, as time went on, she stopped grieving and fearing. Nothing mattered anymore, she could only think these careless things.

How many days were counted like that. And then, one day, a man who she had never seen before appeared. He seemed to be in his mid-thirties. Standing in front of Milifaire, he looked down at her with unwavering eyes, and said this.

Would you like to try and "live" again?

Milifaire stared carefully at the face of someone standing directly in front of her for the first time in a while. The man didn't say any more than that, but she felt like she could understand everything with that single phrase. It was a feeling like lightning running through her entire body.

For a while Milifaire kept silent, and then answered "I will live".

To Milifaire, that was probably her beginning. Since then, time passed by dizzingly. She left the basement, moved from a number of hideouts to other hideouts, and met with a lot of comrades. Her comrades, who knew her as the First Holy Knight's little sister, shed tears for her past, and then were happy to become encouraging friends. Gradually, Milifaire was not just taken in by them, but decided on her own to slip deeply into the organization.

The man who pressed a choice onto her- Ghada, whose name and position as the person who managed the anti-saint faction she learned after quite some time passed and she became familiar with the organization. Because, there were many other men who were older than Ghada, and she thought this resolute and muscular man was more the type of person who displayed a strength in battle over managing people.

However, nowadays, Milifaire was more than convinced about Ghada leading the anti-saint faction. He was certainly a man who boasted of strength, but that wasn't all. But there was a strictness and sincerity to him which attracted people somehow. "I want to be recognized by him"- this thought, before one knew it, they would start to think to themselves. And Milifaire was no exception.

(I can be of help. I'm no longer an aristocratic lady who can't do anything.)

Certainly, compared to others, she might be less powerful. But because she was herself there must be something she could do.

"Hey, Mille."

A voice suddenly called out behind her and, at the same time, something poked her head. Knowing immediately that it was Jin who caught up to her, Milifaire looked back with a glare.

"What are you doing."

"It took too long for you to draw water. -Besides, you had a look like you would stab someone with your eyes. Don't look like a vicious thug in town."

When Jin took the bucket from Milifaire, who fell silent with a discouraged face, Jin shrugged his shoulders in exasperation.

"I'm sure no one thinks of you as a former aristocratic young lady."

"Don't say something like that so easily. We don't know who could be listening in."

In public, the two of them were passing as brother and sister. In a humble house outside of the royal capital, they lived as three people with their father. Of course, their "father" was a member of the anti-saint faction. The youngest daughter, whose body was weak, was taken care of by her father and brother, who would alternate, and the other would take on the role of heading out to their daily work away from home.

Though not everyone in the organization lived in disguise like this. Most of them lived their lives as they were, and only joined up with the others when it was time to meet. It was only those whose circumstances didn't let them do this who lived in this pro forma "family".

"Don't flare up at every little thing. If you're this scared right now, you're not going to hold up."

"I'm not scared."

"I wonder."

Jin shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm prepared. I won't lose my nerve."

Jin looked back from a few steps ahead of Milifaire, who stopped to declare this firmly.

"I'm expecting those words on the day of the attack."

Milifaire bit her lip hard and glared up at Jin.

Although he was a bit rough and thoughtless, he was a man who was quite good at taking care of someone. It could be said that the reason Milifaire was able to become familiar with the organization so quickly was because of his help. However, there was a part of him that was guarded against Milifaire in some way.

Milifaire was somewhat able to sense the reason.

Because Jin questioned how strong Milifaire's feelings of hate were towards Celiastina. The events that occurred during the past- that moment, *the one who truly saw the meaning behind the word hell*, was not Milifaire but her brother *Asyut*. That was why the degree of Milifaire's personal anger was known. At least, that was Jin's point.

(But that's not true.)

Unexpectedly, she recalled the despair that stained her brother's eyes. Milifaire shook her head hurriedly and drove that image out of her awareness.

(I'm here on my own will. I'm here.)

Chanting that in her head once more, Milifaire closed her eyes.

# Chapter Five

Yuna walked around her own room in circles, unable to calm down.

She couldn't bring herself to sit down quietly. She had to do something, anything- this thought pushed her own without meaning.

Two weeks have already passed since she learned of the fact that Ron was waiting eagerly for the anti-saint faction's royal palace attack. There, Yuna had declared "I will go down the path that I believe in" but, in actuality, she couldn't find anything for herself to do. Just by stepping out of her personal rooms she came under care of a bodyguard, so there was no way she could rush out into the town and persuade the anti-saint faction.

No, even if for example she were able to face them and talk to them, they would not accept Yuna's opinions without objections. Far from it, the result would be them gleefully pointing their blades at their target who appeared on their own. These people were planning an attack with their own motives. No matter how Ron thought, this was an unchangeable fact. They were neither being coerced, nor were they being instigated.

She could only wait- the more she thought about it, the more she realized this was the only answer.

(What do I do.)

Yuna sat down on the edge of her bed and didn't move an inch for a while. For some reason, her body felt a little heavy. If she were to lie down like this, she felt like she wouldn't be able to get up. Before that could happen, she immediately stood up again and diligently stretched out the wrinkles made in the sheets without any meaning.

(Anyway, maybe I should consult with Linus or Asyut. But they'll probably say there's nothing that can be done, huh. And indeed that's exactly the case.)

Especially people like Linus, it seemed like he would say he was also looking forward to the anti-saint faction's attack. Asyut would take her a bit more seriously, but right now it was awkward to meet him more than anything else.

(I'd like to ask Neisan about this.)

If only Neisan, who had experience from slipping into the anti-saint faction, could tell her about the internal affairs of the organization. It didn't matter what it was, but if she knew their condition then maybe a bright idea could come to mind. However, a meeting itself with Neisan was forbidden, and so that couldn't be granted either.

(Aah, I really can't do anything.)

The moment she sank into the sofa, sulking, there was a knock on her door. Even though there should still be time before the ceremony.

“Yees?”

A listless reply accidentally slipped out of her mouth. In a hurry, she pulled herself together.

“Sorry, come in.”

“Excuse me.”

The person she saw was Nasha, who seemed to be somewhat happy. Yuna didn't remember requesting anything and thought she came to pour tea, but that didn't seem to be the case either.

“Oh, Nasha. What's wrong?”

“Lady Celiastina, please listen! Previously, you had planted an asiatic jasmine in the infirmary, right? Just now, I was talking to Mislee from the infirmary when we passed each other, and apparently it has grown a small bud.”

“Huh, already?”

At the surprising news, Yuna leaned forward on the sofa.

“It shouldn't be that big yet.”

“Yes, that's why Mislee was surprised as well. She said it was surely because the plant received your blessings, Lady Celiastina.”

Nasha, who was smiling widely, seemed to be as happy as she would be if it were about herself.

Nasha must have gone out of her way to bring this bright news over in order to cheer up Yuna, who had been depressed recently. Nasha was always sensitive to when Yuna was in low spirits and supported her from the background.

She wanted to respond to that kindness-. Yuna returned a tremendous smile to Nasha.

“Oh, I know, why don’t we go and see it together since you’re here, Nasha? You haven’t seen the seedling yet, right? We’ll invite Aeneas, and everyone can go. Maybe pastries will be brought out for us too.”

This is our secret though, when Yuna said this with a laugh, Nasha clapped her hands in delight.

“How lovely. Then I shall call on Ser Aeneas immediately!”

And then, like she was bouncing, she left the room. As she watched Nasha leave, Yuna felt ashamed at her recent pessimistic attitude. How long had it been since she smiled from the bottom of her heart like that? It was true she felt depressed when she thought about the future, but she couldn’t make everyone worry needlessly. Yuna took this to heart.

The infirmary was quiet today as well.

There was a servant who seemed to have cut their finger, but it seemed like their treatment had just finished and, as they were returning, they hurriedly gave Yuna and the others a bow before passing by them like that and exiting the room.

“Oh my, welcome, Lady Celiastina. And Ser Aeneas and Nasha too.”

While tidying up the treatment tools, the person in charge of the infirmary, Mislee, greeted the three of them.

“I see you have a large crowd with you today.”

It was not unreasonable for Mislee to think it surprising. Nasha had helped out Yuna

with caring for the injured people here before, but lately she hadn't shown up here, and Aeneas was always standing in front of the room like a bronze statue and would never enter the room.

"Yes, I was pushy today and had the two of them accompany me."

Right? Yuna threw a smile at the two behind her. Nasha nodded with a large smile, meanwhile Aeneas seemed to not know how to respond and gave an ambiguous smile.

"But is it really alright? Having me together with you. You are all ladies so perhaps....."

Aeneas started to ask this reservedly.

"Of course it's okay. How many times have I asked you, before we got here, to come together with us today."

"A-Ah."

"Now, now, since we're all here, let's all take a seat. I will prepare some tea right now."

Mislee seemed to sense they were going to repeat this subject, and so she stood from her seat and tried to head to the kitchen quickly. However, Yuna stopped her without a moment's delay.

"Ah, please wait. May I prepare the tea today?"

"Oh no, I could not possibly let you do such a thing."

"Don't worry, I know how to make some at least. I'm not sure if I can prepare it deliciously though."

It was the least she could do for making them worry up to now. That's why Yuna had decided before she came here. She couldn't do anything large, but she could at least prepare some tea with all her feelings.

"But—"

"I'm going to borrow the kitchen. Wah, it's a small kitchen but very tidy, huh."

Yuna pretended not to notice Mislee's bewilderment and hurried to the kitchen.

Because it was a clean and orderly kitchen, she immediately knew where the cups and tea leaves were.

“Lady Celiastina, please let me help at least.”

Nasha followed from behind, raising her voice. But Yuna shook her head.

“Thank you, but I’ve wanted to try this. I’ll make something drinkable so sit down.”

“R-Right.”

Nasha also seemed to give up and left the kitchen. When Yuna glanced back, the three were sitting at the table facing each other and appeared to be exchanging a few words. There didn’t seem to be an awkward atmosphere and so Yuna was relieved.

At any rate, it had been a really long time since she prepared tea like this. Yes, since the time she was “Yuna”. Before, Mislee had joked about her tea here being “cheap” but for Yuna it was still quite luxurious. When she poured the hot water, the gentle smell of the tea leaves spread out all at once, and Yuna took in a deep breath.

“Sorry for the wait.”

Yuna returned to the room with the tea placed on a tray. And even she thought it was a somewhat strange sight, making her burst out laughing. The three hurriedly stood up from their seats to help, but Yuna stopped them again. Placing down a cup in front of each person, Yuna also reached her own seat. Along with the tea cakes Mislee put out, she took a drink of her tea. The three unanimously praised her tea for being delicious.

“I-It almost seems like I made you all say that, sorry.”

Yuna smiled wryly with embarrassment.

“No, it’s true. It will be a memory I will remember my whole life, drinking the tea that Lady Celiastina prepared.”

Perhaps deciding to enjoy this situation, Mislee relaxed completely and tossed another tea cake into her mouth. Next, Nasha also relaxed and nodded to Mislee.

“But this must be kept a secret between the four of us, huh. If it was found out that I

drank the same tea at the same table as Lady Celiastina, I may get fired.”

“Ah, that’s true, isn’t it. That won’t do, that won’t do. Then, so that no one comes in, I should hang a sign that says “reserved” on the infirmary’s door.”

“I’ve never seen an infirmary with that kind of sign.”

The three women shared a laugh. Aeneas looked even more reserved from that, but Mislee pulled him little by little into the conversation circle.

“Ser Aeneas, when I look at you from this close distance, you really do look like a fairy tale prince, don’t you.”

“Huh, r-really.”

“That blond hair and those blue eyes are very handsome. Right now, there aren’t many people with blue eyes, right?”

“Is that so. Well, there are many with blue eyes from my mother’s side of the family.”

“Then I wonder if you have your mother’s face, Ser Aeneas. In any case, I’m envious because I have plain brown eyes.”

“I’m the same, Mislee. I’ve wanted a rare and pretty eye color since I was a child.”

At Nasha’s sigh, Aeneas turned his head to her.

“I know someone who has an even stranger eye color. Someone whose eyes change depending on the light that hits it.....”

He said up to that point before coming back to himself and swallowing his words. Yuna knew who that was and acted unconcerned as she continued the conversation.

“Neisan, right? I was surprised when I noticed too. There are people like that, huh.”

“Y-Yes..... the person himself does not seem to care though.”

“Oh? Neisan is like that? I’ve met him several times but I never noticed at all.”

Which reminds me, Mislee said as she dropped her fist on her open palm.

“I’ve forgotten the main topic. Lady Celiastina, you may have already heard from Nasha, but the asiatic jasmine in the garden has started to bud.”

“Ah, yes! I was shocked when I heard about it just now. I thought it would still need a long, long time.”

“I only just saw it this morning. There’s only one and it’s small, but it must have responded to the love you poured into it. Life is strange, isn’t it.”

Life was strange. That was too true.

“Shall we go and see it right now?”

Nasha suggested, standing up and rocking on the balls of her feet.

“Mm, let’s go and see. Aeneas, you too.”

The four of them went together to the backyard. Many branches of the asiatic jasmine’s vines were stuck to the wall of the building surrounding the garden, and it was beginning to assert its existence. A single tree standing in the middle of the garden swayed, seeming to be pleased by the growth of its new companion. From the entrance of the backyard, it was like a painting. The asiatic jasmine was certainly beginning to blend into the garden.

“It’s growing up well, huh.”

Nasha murmured this admiringly as she looked at the asiatic jasmine that had grown to the height of her waist.

“Ah, there’s the bud. It’s so small and cute.”

“When it gets bigger, a lot of pale pink flowers will bloom in a good season. Like a flower curtain.”

Yuna approached the asiatic jasmine and reached out a hand, gently caressing the small bud.

“This place is sunny and it’s growing up receiving your love, Lady Celiastina. I’m sure beautiful flowers will bloom.”

Mislee squinted her eyes at the radiance of the sun and murmured this casually. Yuna looked back at the three, and then looked up into the sky just like Mislee.

Aah, I'm happy, she thought.

THere was a feeling of being filled from the top of her head to the tip of her toes. If she closed her eyes like this, she felt like she was going to be sucked up quietly into the blue sky-.

Right now, she didn't feel any rush, or fear, or anything. A smile slipped out naturally. Yuna spread out both arms and took in a deep breath.

Aah, I'm happy. Once more, she thought that.

After a while, the four people who had returned to the room, took to cleaning up the teaware in a peaceful atmosphere.

“Lady Celiastina, are you still okay for time until the next ceremony?”

Mislee asked this while stacking up the cups they had finished drinking from.

“Yes, I still have a lot of time.”

She smiled and nodded, but Nasha interjected with a hesitant “But”.

“You don't seem to look very well. Perhaps you should return to your room early to rest.”

“Eh, really?”

Yuna tried to feign ignorance, but in reality she could feel it too. Her body was somewhat sluggish- before she came here, at that time in her room she had simply thought it was because she was depressed.

“Let us return to your room temporarily. I will check on the state of the next ceremony.”

Aeneas said this in a tone that was slightly strong. This is after she had thought about not wanting them to worry. Yuna felt like she was pathetic, but if she forced herself on

then they couldn't help but be worried. I think I'm okay, but she nodded while making such a declaration.

Leaving the rest of the clean up to Mislee and Nasha, Yuna and Aeneas left the infirmary.

As was pointed out, she started to feel increasingly worse. Yuna walked naturally behind Aeneas in silence. Aeneas, out of concern for Yuna, slowed his speed but for Yuna right now even that was still too fast.

“Lady Celiastina, how long?”

Aeneas asked in few words.

“Sorry, but I didn't notice myself until just now.”

“Your face is looking very pale. If you do not mind, let me carry you to your room.”

Yuna shook her head strongly at that proposal.

“No, it's okay! It's not that bad. I'm fine.”

See, Yuna made a smile and started walking again firmly. No, she tried to. But her hand was taken by Aeneas, and her feet tangled.

“Lady Celiastina, won't you rely on me more?”

“I'm really okay. It's not that you aren't reliable, Aeneas.”

Being careful not to shake him off, Yuna pulled her hand out from Aeneas' hand. He clenched that empty hand. And his expression looked hurt. Unable to stand seeing that, Yuna faced straight ahead without a moment's delay.

“Lady Celiastina.”

He called her name once more.

At that sincere voice, Yuna bit her lip and stood stock still.

If she took a single step like this, Aeneas would surely not say anything more. He would

surely swallow his own words at that time and think of Yuna's body and thoughts first.

But.

How many times up to now had she turned her eyes away from his feelings like that?

And now she was about to run away from Aeneas again.

Again-.

Yuna bit her lip harder as she continued to stand still.

“Lady Celiastina, I...”

Aeneas spoke to Yuna's back.

“I... love you.”

His voice was as if it were squeezed out from the depths of his heart.

Yuna felt her chest tightening.

“I apologize for the abruptness. I know I shouldn't be telling you this at this time. No, in the first place, I should bear in mind my own position. But.”

Aeneas' voice was already in pain.

“I cannot be beside you with these feelings unsettled any longer.”

“Aeneas.”

Yuna finally looked back and faced the young man who stood reliably. Aah, just like his voice, his face was filled with distress.

“I don't know what to do with myself. I can't gather my thoughts and my head is all messed up. I've tried my hardest to be calm, but in the end it's hopeless.”

“Aeneas.”

“I really think you're precious.”

“Aeneas, listen.”

Yuna walked close to Aeneas and gently took his right hand. It was a very cold hand. The moment Yuna’s fingers, which had drew away just earlier, touched him, Aeneas pulled back his hand as if afraid.

But she stopped that with a strong force.

“Thank you, Aeneas. Your feelings make me really happy.”

His insecure look made him seem like a young boy.

“But I’m sorry. I can’t answer those feelings.”

Yuna told Aeneas this while looking straight into his eyes.

“I...”

She thought to herself that she could not avert her eyes no matter what.

“I love Asyut. It has nothing to do with position or anything. I just... like him.”

“\_!”

“So, I’m sorry.”

Yuna gripped Aeneas’ hand even more strongly. She thought he would break away, but Aeneas didn’t do that.

“Why, why am I not good enough?”

“I don’t know. I can’t give you an explanation. That’s why this hurts so much.”

Conversely, Aeneas’ hand, which had been wrapped by hers, gripped both of her hands back. Lowering his head, it was an action like he was clinging to her hands. His bangs fell down lightly and quietly hid his face.

It hurt, it really hurt.

Having feelings that would never come true.

That's why she fully understood Aeneas' feelings. She was sure Aeneas too, while asking "why", would fully understand Yuna's feelings.

I'm sorry, and thank you.

In her heart, apologies and thanks repeated over and over again many times. She was thankful to Aeneas, so much that these words weren't enough to express them.

Yuna, while staring faintly at Aeneas, opened her mouth slightly.

She tried to say some words but noticed that her lips weren't moving anymore.

It wasn't just her lips. Her hands and feet too, everything was like it was buried in mud and wouldn't move.

(Why-)

The sight in front of her eyes grew dim. Aeneas raised his head, puzzled, and the contours of his face blurred.

(No!)

Thinking that, in the next moment, everything went blank. Only Aeneas' voice, calling out her name sharply, managed to remain in her ears.

# Chapter Six

A room, lined with extremely luxurious furniture.

There were ten men, including Asyut, seated around a large round table. Their serious expressions were reflected on top of the diligently polished table. Four tall gilded pillars surrounded the men at a distance and looked down on them- the ceiling was far off. Complex patterns were drawn on that ceiling, as if representing the tangled relationships between the men.

Asyut massaged the furrow between his brows with his left hand, elbow resting on the table. Fortunately, the deep sigh that leaked out didn't seem to enter anyone's ears. But that wasn't surprising, something like a single person's sigh would disappear under the vigorous exchange of opinions happening in front of him. Vigorous opinions- yes, that expression sounded nice, but honestly several people were especially insistent on their own opinions.

There were around five civil officials who reported directly to the king; the remaining people were prominent priests. In this meeting, which began with these members, Asyut was the representative of the Order of Knights, and was essentially participating as a neutral party. Ordinarily, the priests passed their time in their tower under their own laws, but if they made a request, it was custom to open a meeting like this. This time the request was particularly strong from the priests' side and so a meeting was held in a hurry.

The topic of discussion they brought in was about the country's reaction to the anti-saint faction.

"In any case, I do not agree that the country is in a condition to leave the anti-saint faction to take care of itself. If you make light of a small organization, the carpet will be pulled from under you at an unexpected moment."

This was a priest who could be seen to be in his late sixties with short hair that was conspicuously white. The man, called Roblin, was one who had been snapping at the royal palace for a while with exclusive values. He was a troublesome person.

"Lord Roblin speaks the truth. What exactly does the king intend."

The other priests followed him. The civil officials lowered their eyes, as if exhausted.

“No, the country is definitely not leaving the faction to itself. The other day, the conflict that occurred in the royal capital was suppressed.”

A civil official, who belonged to the younger group in his early forties, explained while keeping his eyes lowered on the documents at hand.

“That is nothing more than pulling out one weed in the wilderness! What point is there in that!”

The civil official trembled and shut his mouth at Roblin’s indignation.

“Please calm down. There is no doubt it is important to suppress small uprisings. Moreover, if we wish to completely crush the organization, then the country must be discreet with its movements. If we rush and show our hand, we will simply end up scattering the spider’s children. It is for that not to be the case that we are having discussions upon discussions right now.”

The person who opened his mouth instead was a civil official called Garon, who had an imposing beard. He was unperturbed at Roblin’s stabbing-like gaze and, on the other hand, he did not show a thoughtless attitude that would pour oil on the fire.

Asyut kept silent and watched over the proceedings.

“How easygoing!”

The only female priest in this place raised a high, shrill voice.

“Once the people know about the movements of the anti-saint faction, they will be nothing but shocked. There is nothing more deplorable than purposefully not disclosing a problem that will trouble them! It may be said that the people will lose their trust in the country.”

“Exactly! The mere existence of those accursed people who would raise their hand against the saint, said to be a treasure to this world, is a black stain and large disgrace on this country! If the present situation exposes itself to the people, I could not bear it!”

Roblin again. At his anger, the civil officials could do nothing but look at each other

and close their mouths. However, it didn't seem like they were just being pushed by that threatening attitude. Even Asyut could feel there was one or two points in the words from priests' side.

Far from it, that was exactly what the king's aim was.

However, if Asyut said that then a huge problem, incomparable to the uprising of the anti-saint faction, would break out between the king and the priests.

Asyut straightened his sitting posture, wondering if he should raise his voice soon. In this meeting Asyut, who was markedly young, rarely expressed his opinion. If he gave a plausible opinion, he could see Roblin's glare leap to him. And that's why he tried to mention only the opinions he thought were truly necessary. In exchange, he kept his mouth closed at every important point as something like a facilitator or moderator.

At this time, it was a suitable moment. He could not let this one-sided rebuke go on any longer. He would promise an urgent response, and dissolve this meeting for the moment-.

But.

Unexpectedly, the meeting was forced to adjourn without conclusion.

Without any previous notice, the door to the room was suddenly opened.

This rarely happened. Everyone turned their heads to the intruder, taken aback, to see a civil official with an extremely serious look and tightly pressed lips. The civil official glanced at every one, who had stiffened wondering if an emergency happened, and then rushed to Asyut's side without hesitation.

“Excuse my intrusion while you are busy.”

He quietly whispered into Asyut's ear. And the moment Asyut comprehended the contents, he stood up from his chair with such force that it was kicked back.

“W-What happened.”

One of the priests called out, startled. But Asyut did not have the time to answer.

“Excuse me.”

Telling them those two words, Asyut left the meeting place without turning back. Roblin's shout came flying at his back, asking what exactly happened, but he couldn't care less about them.

—Celiastina had collapsed.

†

Unconcerned about people's eyes, Asyut ran through the halls and finally slowed when he could see Celiastina's room. Getting his rough breathing in order, he took a long hard look at the front of her room. —Someone stood at the door.

It didn't take long to know that was Aeneas. In that moment, a violent impulse, like rage, rose up in his chest. Aeneas, even as he closed the door, sent a look into the room behind him with painful reluctance.

As Asyut stepped up briskly, Aeneas also noticed him. For an instant, an uncomfortable expression appeared, but it immediately changed into resolve.

“What happened.”

Asyut couldn't hold back his strict tone.

“On her return from the infirmary, she suddenly collapsed. According to the doctor's diagnosis, it does not appear to be a serious problem. It may have just been accumulated fatigue.”

“.....And her consciousness?”

“It has not returned yet, but it is said she will wake up soon.”

Now then, excuse me. Aeneas said that with a nod and then turned on his heel and left. —Asyut wondered if something happened between Aeneas and Celiastina. Even though he knew there was no use in being suspicious, he couldn't remain calm inside.

But right now it was about Celiastina's condition.

He knocked just in case but, as he thought, no words came back. Asyut opened the

door like that and walked to the bedside, while being careful not to step loudly. Unexpectedly, Celiastina had a peaceful expression as she laid there with her eyes closed.

“.....”

Pulling up a chair beside the bed and sitting down in it, Asyut stared intently at her sleeping profile. Asyut's heart finally settled when he heard her regular breathing. The moment he heard she had collapsed, he thought his heart had been seized.

Come to think of it... Asyut reflected in his mind as he stared at Celiastina.

(This happened once before.)

Thinking back, it was already such a long time ago. The signature collection that happened to prevent the execution of the young man who was caught attempting to assassinate the saint. Celiastina, who had been active under the strong sun, overworked and collapsed.

At that time too, he had waited beside Celiastina, just like this, for her to wake. But his heart was not the same as then.

(Before, it didn't feel like my body was being torn apart like this.)

Until the time she awaked, why had he been able to sit calmly. Right now he felt like, if he relaxed his control, he would grab Celiastina's shoulders and call out in a loud voice while shaking her.

(“Until the last moment”–)

Those words from that time revived abruptly in his mind. Asyut stretched out a hand to Celiastina's pale cheek.

I'm okay, he wanted her to say that while smiling. He felt like he hadn't heard the voice she spoke to him with in a long time. He wanted her to call his name. He wanted to hear her say his name in that soft voice.

He gently stroked her cheek.

To think he had feelings to this mad extent still inside him.

It was something he thought he had lost forever. No matter what he saw, or heard, his heart had always been cold to the very bottom- he was sure that there was nothing that would ever shake his heart strongly again. -And yet.

The girl who had froze Asyut's heart in the past, with the same appearance, was now melting it this time.

It was ironic and yet he didn't feel like laughing. That didn't matter anymore though.

As long as she woke up. And as long as she stayed by his side forever. Just that.

(If I would lose her, then I don't even care if she and the past Lady Celiastina are the same person- not anymore.)

Even if all the events that occurred in the past were to be thrusted before his eyes right now.

Even if all his deceased loved ones were to speak ill of him from the heavens.

Even still, he could not throw these feelings away. He would not lose them.

He should have known.

That he... loved her.

“.....Asyut.....?”

Hearing a fragile voice call out his name, Asyut returned to himself. Celiastina was looking up at him with eyes that were slightly cracked open.

“Lady Celiastina.”

Asyut instinctively leaned forward and gripped Celiastina's hand.

“Have you come to?”

“This is.....”

Celiastina slowly looked around the room with eyes that were out of focus.

“Your private room, Lady Celiastina. You collapsed on the way back from the infirmary and were carried here.”

“.....”

He explained with brief words, as if instructing her. However, Celiastina still seemed to be absent-minded and vacant.

“I.....”

“Yes?”

“I’m alive.”

Asyut, still gripping her hand tightly, couldn’t move.

“I’m still... alive.”

It seemed liked she was speaking to herself more than she was to Asyut. He couldn’t help but place his other hand on top of the one that held hers.

“Of course. You’re alive.”

When he told her that in a strong tone, Celiastina moved her gaze to Asyut once again. A light had returned to her eyes, more than before.

“–Mm, that’s right. Sorry, I said something strange, huh.”

And Celiastina, who smiled, looked fleeting as if she were on the verge of vanishing.

“Did I sleep a lot, I wonder. Could it be that it’s passed the time for the ceremony?”

Saying that, Celiastina raised her upper body and Asyut embraced her strongly like that.

“A-Asyut?”

Celiastina's voice, colored with surprise and embarrassment, called out his name again from within his arms. Asyut felt her twist her body out of bewilderment, but he didn't loosen his strength. What's wrong, I'm fine now, even if she threw out words like that piece by piece, he absolutely wouldn't let her go. Eventually, Celiastina closed her mouth like she gave up and her shoulders relaxed.

A momentary silence.

Suddenly, Celiastina murmured in a trembling voice.

"I'm... scared."

It was a small voice. But she certainly said that.

"I'm scared....."

That was surely the truth Celiastina tried to keep shut deep inside her heart.

Not showing it to anyone, not letting anyone know, she was going to leave.

Right now, for the first time, he felt like he had touched the deepest part of her heart.

Three days later, Celiastina took care to rest in her room.

Asyut came to visit her every day during that time, but from then on Celiastina never opened up again. It was painful for Asyut to watch her act as if nothing had happened. The fact that he couldn't do anything for her made him irritated.

"Asyut, I'm really okay already."

Today was the third day and Celiastina had already slipped out of her bed. Even her face, when she raised it from the book she was reading, had a much better complexion. If this was the case, it seemed like he didn't need to worry anymore but...

"Your complexion certainly looks better. But because it isn't good to stay in your room for a long time, how about we take a stroll through the garden, if you feel inclined."

"That's true."

Celiastina smiled and nodded, but he could no longer understand her true feelings.

“—Lady Celiastina.”

As such, Asyut spoke all the more.

“Do you remember?”

He gently reached out a hand to a flower in a vase that decorated this room’s desk.

“Before, we spoke about torch bugs in the flower garden.”

Celiastina looked at Asyut’s fingertips touching the flower.

“.....Mm.”

The young bugs, when they were larvae, looked similar to the sinister appearance of a poisonous bug. However, when they matured, their entire body released light and they became a beautiful bug. That was a torch bug.

During the time when these bugs became adults and flew around the flower garden, they had promised to go and see those lights together.

“It is almost the season for those lights to be lit.”

“I see, so much time has already passed, huh.”

Celiastina murmured this with a voice that was deeply emotional somewhere.

“That was quick...”

And then she came to stand beside Asyut, reaching out to the flower vase in the same way. Her hand was trembling slightly. Ah, the moment Asyut thought that, Celiastina’s hand clumsily touched the vase and it careened to the ground.

“Watch out!”

At the same time Asyut shielded Celiastina, the flower vase smashed with a loud noise.

“Ah, s-sorry!”

Holding back Celiastina who tried to kneel in a panic and pick up the shards, Asyut picked them up instead.

“Are you alright?”

“Y-Yes. I’m okay but.....”

“I’ve only picked up the large fragments, and we’ll have the maids sweep the rest with a broom later. Until then, please try not to approach this area.”

“Mm.”

When he raised his head, thinking that she sounded close to crying, it was exactly as he thought and Celiastina was staring at the scattered fragments with teary eyes.

“Lady Celiastina.....”

“Sorry, it’s ridiculous, but I guess I’m not back to normal yet. I’m being weird, aren’t I.”

“Lady Celiastina.”

Asyut shook his head slowly. It felt terribly frustrating that both his hands were occupied with fragments from the flower vase.

“There is no need to force yourself to act cheerful in front of me. Please act however you’d like with me, on your own terms, because there is no need to carry anything alone... whatever it is.”

Celiastina did not reply immediately. She continued to stare hard at Asyut’s hands before finally nodding.

Perhaps he should use this occasion to ask clearly about “Until the last moment”-.

The moment Asyut opened his mouth, the door was knocked on roughly, and then opened without waiting for an answer. When Asyut raised his head, Siegcrest stood there with a sullen expression and in a worn Order of Knights uniform.

“Siegcrest.”

“Sieg.”

When the two called out his name, Siegcrest raised one hand lightly in response.

“Sorry to interrupt your lover’s meeting, but Asyut can I have some of your time. It’s urgent.”

Even while he smiled teasingly, Siegcrest’s eyes were serious. Asyut wrapped the picked up fragments in a handkerchief and tossed it into the trash, before apologizing to Celiastina and standing up. Understanding Siegcrest’s gesture to the hallway with his chin, Asyut left the room. He confirmed there was no signs of life in the hallway before turning to face Siegcrest at once.

“What exactly happened.”

“The king has moved on the anti-saint faction.”

“What?”

Asyut’s brows drew together.

“The names of the people belonging to the anti-saint faction have been posted all around the city. As soon as they are found, they are to be handed over to the royal palace, is what the notice says.”

“Surely not.....”

“That’s not all either. In those names, your little sister is there too.”

“—!”

A shock struck his chest. Then his heart began to beat violently. Asyut clenched his fists, trying somehow to compose himself.

“A commotion is starting to spread in the royal palace too, with people wondering if there was some kind of mistake. There seem to be many who think your sister has been caught by the anti-saint faction. And so, normally, her name wouldn’t be exposed to the public like a criminal, right? Have you heard anything?”

Linus had told him to “be prepared” but to think the situation would move in this shape. He felt a sense of vertigo– to the point where he almost couldn’t even stand.

“.....Yeah.”

But still, Asyut managed to squeeze out a voice.

“Not from the king himself, but I heard about Milifaire.”

“And her name being posted?”

Asyut shook his head without any strength.

“I didn’t know about that, but I knew the king would be taking some kind of action in the near future.”

“What do you mean?”

“There seems to be someone in the anti-saint faction who betrayed them for the royal palace’s side. Through that, the king has grasped the other’s internal affairs.”

“.....Since when did you know that?”

“Just a few days ago. I asked the king personally and half of the questions were dodged, but if I consider my talk with Lord Linus then there is no mistake.”

That sly old man, Siegcrest clicked his tongue.

“I see. He grew tired of small skirmishes with the anti-saint faction and has lit a fire under their asses to stir them up, huh. If I were a member of the anti-saint faction and my name was made public, I wouldn’t be able to live a normal life anymore. Willingly or not, they’ll have to make a move.”

“.....That is the case.”

“But, if he understood their internal affairs, wasn’t there another way of doing something about your little sister?”

“.....It can’t be helped.”

It can’t be helped, his own words echoed emptily.

“Because it doesn’t seem like Milifaire has been caught by the anti-saint faction.”

“What?”

“She’s with the anti-saint faction of her own will.”

It took all he had to say that much.

His own words felt like a blade that cut at his body. He couldn’t even look at Siegcrest’s face, who had become speechless. His gaze, which dropped to his feet, was captured by his own shadow whose head hung down without strength. Really, why did it become like this?

“–Is that true?”

At that moment, a parched voice broke in between the two silent people.

Asyut and Siegcrest looked back, taken aback. The hallway shouldn’t have had anyone, but he had forgotten about the one and only person who was close beside him–.

Celiastina, who had opened the door and appeared, looked up at Asyut with a worried look.

“Asyut… is that… true?”

“.....”

Asyut couldn’t answer anything, and so he kept silent.

“No doubt about it.”

Asyut sent a blaming look at Siegcrest, who had answered instead. However, Siegcrest was unperturbed.

“Even if you hide it up, it’ll be exposed once everything is finished. In that case, isn’t it better to talk about it from the start.”

“.....”

He didn’t want to tell Celiastina. He thought he couldn’t tell her.

Talking about his little sister, Milifaire, meant talking about “that event” of the past.

But he still felt like the wound was too deep to do so. Moreover, he also didn't want to involve her and have her take on any more responsibility.

But more than anything else.

He was afraid that, if the past was known, a distance would be placed more and more between them. He wanted her to stay unknowing about this matter. Because if she was unaware, then he could act like nothing had happened between them.

Maybe those thoughts were a mistake though.

Faced with Celiastina's eyes which were unmuddied, Asyut couldn't move. Her determination to desperately accept the truth was conveyed.

"Anyway, I'm going to confirm the chaotic situation around town. -You two need to cut it out and talk properly."

Saying that, Siegcrest turned on his heel and left.

The remaining two people were wrapped in silence. Asyut turned to face Celiastina directly again.

To talk-.

Asyut drew in a small breath and then released it slowly.

"Asyut."

Celiastina's voice, which carried her core, gave Asyut's back a push.

# Chapter Seven

“It certainly seems like even the royal palace has fallen into an uproar.”

Hearing Asyut murmur that Yuna was relieved that, contrary to expectations, he was calm.

In the corner of the complicatedly built palace; the two of them stood on a tasteless terrace.

They could see the royal palace's west side plaza, one of the places where the names of the members of the anti-saint faction was posted, clearly from here. Once again, she realized that there were many of these elevated places built into the royal palace where one could see movements below in one sweep. Even now, there was no one – amongst those who were standing in front of the bulletin board – who noticed them here.

“It is because there are many in the anti-saint faction who live normally on the surface. If the names of acquaintances are on there, that alone would cause great upset.”

“.....That's true.”

That was the action Ron chose.

Yuna still couldn't believe that was one side of the king, who she saw as a calm and good-natured old man. One could not just be gentle, but at times had to be ruthless – perhaps it was something like that. Or was it that the gentle smile directed towards her was nothing more than a fabrication? Yuna didn't know.

“How much do you know about my younger sister?”

Asyut asked that to Yuna who was looking at the plaza with solemn eyes. Returning her gaze to Asyut, Yuna shook her head slowly.

“Nothing really. There was a huge problem which happened between me and you, Asyut, and that was the excuse to drive your little sister out..... that was all I heard from Linus.”

I see, Asyut said and nodded.

"Then, Lady Celiastina, you do not know anything about the problems that occurred between us."

"Mm."

"In order to talk about that, we will need to start by retracing the past. However, it will be long..... Do you mind?"

Of course she didn't mind. When she looked up directly at Asyut with that meaning, he closed his eyes for a brief period, and then slowly started talking.

From the start, there was no discord between Asyut and Celiastina.

It was best to say that they interacted with one another in a very common way, as a man and woman who were in a political marriage. Although Celiastina seemed to have an intense fear of strangers, Asyut did not take care to treat her specially because of that, nor did he seem to have an interest in her. He would have been the same no matter who the other person was. Asyut attended to Celiastina with that intention.

Perhaps, if nothing had happened like that, they would have slowly closed the distance between them and started living like a married couple. However, that wasn't the case. A few years after Celiastina arrived at the royal palace, after every servant connected to her was fired all at once, everything fell apart.

No matter how much time passed, the two remained as distant as ever. But that didn't mean Celiastina was unfamiliar with the royal palace at all. Towards others, Celiastina started opening her heart clumsily. Asyut thought she would slowly fit into the royal palace like that, and so did everyone else.

However:

Suddenly, Celiastina completely changed. No one knew the reason. Only that she started acting unreasonably and cruelly. She didn't lend her ears to anyone's persuasions at all. Far from that, she declared without any hesitation that those who opposed the saint would be sentenced with capital punishment. When it became clear that it was not just a threat, those that remonstrated her decreased across the palace.

There was no one but him to stop Celiastina.

It was not very long before Asyut thought that with a strong determination. He could not allow Celiastina to continue doing whatever she pleased like this. To stop her, it was necessary to know the reason for her complete change. Asyut started investigating information from when Celiastina had arrived at the royal palace. There must have been something, anything, a decisive event. A truth that people simply didn't know, but that was surely sleeping in the royal palace-.

The majority of his investigations ended in vain, but he was able to obtain one curious information. That was the Record of Congratulations and Condolences. Asyut had flipped through that record book quite accidentally. Because his exhaustion had accumulated, most of the content didn't enter his mind. However, on the contrary, perhaps that was for the best because something suddenly occurred to him.

Since Celiastina had arrived at the royal palace, the number of accidental deaths had increased.

-Ah, that's how it was.

Asyut thought as he woke up. Why did he forget this? Hadn't there been secret rumors about this at the time?

Once he realized this, the rest happened in the blink of an eye. After investigating the histories of the people who had passed away in the years before Celiastina's sudden change, it was clear that all but one had been people who had a history of serving Celiastina. Furthermore, as a result of questioning people there at the time, it was brought to light that only the people that Celiastina, who had an intense fear of strangers, opened up to died.

Was this simply a coincidence? That was impossible.

It had something to do with the reason Celiastina had become like a different person. Asyut changed his intuition into a conviction.

And then Asyut resolved himself to confront Celiastina.

Since her sudden change, those who told their opinions to her either suffered the death penalty or, if fortunate, went through the bitter experience of being banished from the royal palace. However even Celiastina could not act out strongly against her fiancé, Asyut. Thinking that, Asyut visited Celiastina alone..... though when he realized that his thoughts had been too shallow, he was already stuck deep in such a way that he was unable to backtrack.....

†

*"In other words, what do you wish to say?"*

Interrupting Asyut, who had started to talk, Celiastina looked at him with cold eyes.

*"Pulling up those old records; what do you wish to do with me?"*

Facing the cold air that was wrapped around his fiancée whom he had not seen in a while, Asyut shuddered inwardly. Everything was different from the first time he met her. He even felt that there was a complete stranger in front of him.

*"In the end, you think me a hindrance."*

Unable to speak, Asyut only shook his head. Seeing him like that, Celiastina sneered with a cold expression.

*"This Record of Congratulations and Condolences: Irufis, Sonia, Paul..... they are all nostalgic names. I wonder why everyone died. Lord Asyut, do you know the reason?"*

*"I do not know. However, you must know."*

And he wanted her to say it. He wanted her to reveal everything without carrying everything alone-.

But Asyut's thoughts did not reach Celiastina. For an instant there was a fleeting sorrow that could be taken as pity which appeared in her eyes, and then Celiastina opened her mouth again.

*"You not knowing is a lie. You thought it, didn't you. That I killed everyone. And you came here to ascertain that with me. Am I mistaken?"*

I killed everyone. Hearing those words, Asyut felt something cold run down his back.

*"Lord Asyut, if I were to say here that I did not kill those servants you have brought up, would you say you believe me? If I said their deaths were not my intention, I wonder how you would respond. Which one do you believe. Me, or yourself–"*

Asyut couldn't answer. Celiastina's insanity swelled up before his eyes. Even if he tried to stop it, Asyut could not find the means. He finally realized that the current Celiastina was not in a state to talk properly, but it was already too late.

*"But that is truly cruel! If you say I killed them then I would kindly ask you to show me the evidence. Because I did not kill them and I did not wish for their deaths. And yet, everyone disappears from me!"*

*"Lady Celiastina, please calm down."*

*"Do you think I can be calm? You tried to smear a baseless crime against me, the saint. You tried to mark me as a murderer. Though I am innocent! Even if you are the First Holy Knight, this won't end with just a crime of slander. For, just now, you have made an enemy of God!"*

*"I did not say you killed them! I only want to know what happened at that time!"*

*"SILENCE! I do not wish to hear any more from you!"*

Celiastina, who glared sharply at Asyut, was crying. Asyut stared at those tears spilling over and falling from eyes filled with anger with a feeling like hopelessness.

*"And then I received Lady Celiastina's judgement."*

Asyut did not try to look at Yuna and did nothing but glare at the current plaza. Yuna looked at the side of his face and just silently urged him on.

*"However, even the king could not easily dismiss me as the First Holy Knight. While severely admonishing me for casting improper doubts on Lady Celiastina, he was considerate enough not to hand down a serious judgment on me personally."*

But still, it was said that Celiastina could not accept that.

*"In front of me, who had not received a great crime, Lady Celiastina caused a*

commotion by implying that she would end her own life. She said that she was unable to endure being unfoundedly condemned by me, her fiancé. And that if the country were to try and protect me then it would be better for her to be gone."

Celiastina shouted that while holding a sharp blade to her neck. It was right against the area with the Holy Mark. Those who surrounded her once again remembered the meaning of her being the saint. –If she died, then the lives of thousands of men would be exposed to danger like that. Only the absence of the saint must be avoided no matter what, no matter what other sacrifices had to paid–.

In the end, Asyut was to be punished once again.

Everyone around him weighed the merits of Asyut and Celiastina. At which time it was clear as day as to which side it leaned to greatly.

Asyut also did not hate those who made that decision. He held no grudge because he personally would have arrived at the same conclusion. Compared to losing Saint Celiastina, his existence was equal to a speck of dust.

But Celiastina did not desire for Asyut to lose his standing or his death. Celiastina decided to punish him in another way. She suddenly sent for an urgent assembly under Asyut's name. There was an announcement for only those related to Asyut to gather at the royal palace as soon as possible due to special circumstances.

The deadline for the assembly was a few hours.

*"I wonder how many of your relatives can be gathered in this short amount of time? I suppose those gathered will be those who have pledged a deep loyalty to this country and you."*

In the beginning, Asyut did not understand that meaning. He wondered what she meant by gathering only his relatives.....

One person after another, people who Asyut recognized, came. Everyone seem to be puzzled by this sudden assembly. There were those who paled upon seeing Celiastina but they were no longer allowed to return home.

*"Everyone, thank you for your hard work. However, there is still time. Let us wait a while*

*longer. And then we will have a very important conversation."*

When he watched the beautiful profile of Celiastina, who was smiling sweetly, Asyut gradually began to catch onto her intention. Celiastina had seen through exactly to what would make Asyut suffer the most. The best way to punish him, more painful than having his own body torn to pieces–.

*"Brother, I've arrived."*

The last who appeared was his little sister, Milifaire. The instant Asyut saw that small figure he forgot how to breathe. He was driven by an urge to shout and ask why she had come. But in front of an enormous hopelessness, not even that energy could arise.

*"Now, everyone, you've all gathered well."*

Celiastina showed a smile laden with madness.

*"Everyone, I have gathered you all here to have you compensate for the crime of my fiancé, Lord Asyut."*

The air in the place shook. Ten people were gathered here in all. There were men, most of them with heavy responsibilities in the royal palace, and amongst them there were several wives included. And then there was still his little sister, Milifaire, innocent enough to be called a young girl. They all looked at each other. And then, at the end, they directed their gazes to Asyut as if relying on him. As if they were asking what this was all about.

*"Lord Asyut, you may choose only one person."*

Celiastina nestled close to Asyut with a smile that instinctively charmed people and said that while gently holding his right hand.

*"–The one person you choose will be saved. The rest will all be executed."*

He understood, but his mind would not move in that moment.

Right now, what did she say. His mind refused to comprehend it. Asyut just stood still there on the spot.

The gathered people also responded similarly. –A response that showed that they weren't even able to respond.

In this gorgeous but small room, the air had completely frozen over. Time stopped and there was no one who moved. They just stared, overcome with surprise, at the girl who smiled sweetly like a goddess.

*"I will stop blaming you personally, Lord Asyut. Your words injured me to an extent where I thought I would die, but you said what you did with good intentions, didn't you? In that case, as your future wife, I should stop holding a grudge against you. However, responsibility needs to be taken for mistakes. If not, this will continue to be dragged out between us. That is why."*

Celiastina's eyes gently narrowed with satisfaction and she looked over the gathered people.

*"I will let it all be washed away with these ladies and gentlemen."*

*"–That's absurd!"*

Finally Asyut, who broke the spell, raised a shout that came from the depths of his body. Had there ever been such an irrational method? Weren't these all people who had no crimes and had not the slightest bit of contact with Celiastina? And yet, and yet–.

*"This was a solution I thought up without sleeping for days. Please do not refuse it. This is because when I tried to punish you before, the king and the people around him stopped me. This time I consulted them in advance. And these eminent people said that if it would reconcile everything then it would be fine."*

Who the hell was it. What foolish person granted that permission to this mad woman–. Asyut felt an anger enough to make him tremble, but he wasn't able to explode that rage. Celiastina's life was absolute. That was the conclusion that he himself had derived.

*".....Lady Celiastina. These people have nothing to do with us. If you cannot forgive me, Lady Celiastina, then please I beg of you to bestow punishment on me personally."*

Please, Asyut said and kneeled on the spot. Just before he bent down, the sight of his sister with tears from her fear entered his vision.

*"What are you saying. That won't do. I won't hurt you. Having had discussions with the king, I have also changed my mind. And that, if I were to lose you, my fiancé, I would also follow after you."*

It was futile no matter how he struggled. Asyut and the others had been abandoned. They were trapped in this small room and forsaken. They were chosen as sacrifices to abate Celiastina's mad desires.

"....."

Asyut stood up, swaying, and looked over at his gathered relatives.

His parents had died early. There stood the figure of an uncle who was reliable and had supported that Asyut and his little sister, Milifaire. He also spotted the figure of his older cousin, whose political opinions he didn't agree with but whose steadfast honesty and versatility was exactly the same as his. There was also the face of the madam who his little sister loved dearly like a mother. Everyone was pale but there was no one who broke down or lost their presence of mind.

*"I intend to take your opinion in, Lord Asyut. That is why you may choose one person. I will send that person home without raising my hand to them."*

There was no way he could choose. That would be too cruel. Choosing only one person meant nothing other than Asyut abandoning the rest by his own will. If that was the case, then it would be better for them all to be executed and for him to be killed on top of that.

.....But Celiastina understood that much.

*"Lord Asyut. Please hurry and choose before Lady Celiastina changes her mind."*

His maternal uncle said that firmly. Those eyes told of how he had already resolved himself.

*".....Y-Yes, that's right. There is someone you must choose, isn't there."*

His paternal uncle smiled and drew his wife towards himself. His wife also had a pale face but she showed a smile and gave a steady nod.

*"No, no! There is no way I can choose one person. At least- at least half of them!"*

If he had to make a cruel choice then he wanted to save even one person more. However.

*“No, that won’t do. Only one person.”*

Celiastina informed him clearly in a penetratingly cold voice.

*“Now, who will you choose. You can’t choose amongst those here? In that case, I can send another call out and we can wait a while longer. Then, once more people have assembled, you should be able to choose amongst those, right?”*

Asyut glared at Celiastina with a look filled with murderous intent. But Celiastina just squinted her eyes and smiled as if she were receiving a gentle breeze.

*“Lord Asyut. Hurry, everyone understands!”*

*“Yes, you lost your parents early so you know what you cannot lose anymore.”*

*“You’ve decided on who you must choose, right.”*

Asyut continued to glare at Celiastina and promptly placed a hand on the handle of his sword. Everyone in the spot jumped at Asyut and pinned him down.

*“Idiot, what would become of things if you did that! Disasters would be caused and there would be an incomparable number of victims!”*

***“THIS WOMAN SHOULD BE PUT IN PRISON NEVER TO SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN! OTHERWISE THE SAME THINGS WILL JUST BE REPEATED!”***

Asyut lost control of himself and yelled. But that voice did not reach.

*“If I am put in prison, I will bite my tongue and die.”*

Celiastina told him that in a sing-song voice.

*“.....B-Brother.....”*

It was his little sister, Milifaire, that settled Asyut, who had lost himself, with a voice soaked in tears.

*“Stop, brother. Stop.....”*

The strength in Asyut's body suddenly left him. Unable to stand, Asyut dropped to both knees on the spot.

*“Now, Lord Asyut, hurry and choose.”*

Asyut sluggishly raised his head at Celiastina's voice which seemed lively somewhere. Milifaire, who was trembling with both hands covering her mouth, entered his vision. As soon as their eyes met, Milifaire violently shook her head.

Who would he choose. No, he didn't want to choose anyone. But if he didn't choose then the number of victims would just increase aimlessly. He had to choose someone. Who would he choose. Now, hurry–.

Hurry and choose!

“In the end, I chose my younger sister, Milifaire. And then, the following day, the rest of them were all executed. My sister did not forgive me for choosing only one person. Furthermore, she could not forgive herself for being the only one saved. A chasm that could not be filled was opened between us.”

In that opportune time, Celiastina passed down an order to banish Milifaire. It was said that Milifaire disappeared from the royal palace without Asyut even having the time to reach out.

“There are not many who know of this inside the royal palace. As one would expect, it would be bad for the saint's reputation to have executed the relatives of her fiancé, and so the truth was hidden..... although, because ten people suddenly disappeared, there are many who realized that something happened.”

Yuna was silent and continued to watch Asyut's profile.

There was no way she could find the words she should say. She was too powerless– and too much an outsider to share in his pain.

She couldn't... do anything. She couldn't say anything.

“Even so, I chose to remain in the royal palace. I suppose those who knew the truth could not understand that at all. Having received that treatment, why did I still cling to the position of the First Holy Knight. Why did I resign myself to the position of being the fiancé to Lady Celiastina, who I should have hated more than anyone else. I believe there were many who were vexed and thought that I should be doing something else.”

“That’s...”

Not true, is what Yuna screamed in her heart.

She felt like she could understand Asyut’s persistence, to the extent where killed his own heart. Regardless of how much she was hurt, how much despair tormented her, there was something she would not yield on. The people who lived and supported her daily- if they were not illusions and certainly existed then she would want to stand straight for them. Even if she were to become covered in wounds, she did not want to turn her back and run. All the more so because there was nothing else left-.

Wasn’t it the former Asyut himself who taught her that.

“In any case, since Milifaire left the royal palace, I immediately began searching for her whereabouts. From corner to corner of the town, I even investigated to the brothel at the outskirts. However, I could not find her at all.”

Naturally, she understood what that meant.

“That she could not be found even after doing that much meant that she was intentionally slipping through the search net. A single powerless girl would not be able to do that, so I considered that there was an “organization” hiding her.”

“The anti-saint faction.....”

“Correct. In the beginning, she might have been something close to being confined. However, I believe that, surrounded by people who held grudges against the saint and royal palace, the more time Milifaire spent with them the more she saw kindred souls and began to think and act the same as them.”

Asyut’s expression twisted in pain. At the end of his gaze was the bulletin board that had Milifaire’s name posted. Of course, it was too far to read from here but it was certain that her name existed there.

“Asyut, I...”

Yuna tightly squeezed the terrace fence with both her hands. She tried to say something to Asyut and then closed her mouth. She couldn't find the words to say, because she was sure that he didn't want words of apology or words of comfort.

“It is clear that Milifaire is affiliated with the anti-saint faction. There is likely no mistake in how she has not just been captured. Naturally I have thoughts about wanting to rescue her. However, if she attacks the royal palace as a member of the anti-saint faction.”

Asyut glared at the plaza with grim eyes.

“I cannot go this way and that way with an indecisive attitude. I will confront her resolutely.”

How many times has he made a tragic decision like this. When Yuna thought about Asyut's mental state, she felt like her heart was being gouged out.

“–This has been quite a long talk.”

Perhaps he was concerned for Yuna, but Asyut returned to a calm voice again and said that.

“The wind is becoming cold so let us return inside the building. I apologize for you have not regained perfect health yet.”

“No, I'm okay.”

As she answered, Yuna felt very much like crying. This impulse that welled up inside of her heart was surely the tears that Asyut had not shed.

(But that's exactly why I can't shed these tears.)

Yuna clenched her teeth. She wouldn't cry. She absolutely wouldn't cry.

While clenching her teeth, she thought on how strong Asyut was. How much despair had he been assaulted with, how much helplessness had he been stricken with? She was certain that it was not just once or twice where he seriously wished to abandon everything.

She wasn't strong like Asyut.

(But.)

Even so, she wanted to continue walking forward in the time allowed. Aah, how far could she go.

(I haven't given up yet either, Asyut.)

Yuna, without making a sound, said that to the broad back in front of her eyes.

Yuna, who was escorted back to her room by Asyut, rushed out of her room again.

This time alone. She did not have a bodyguard.

If she called Aeneas she was certain of what his reaction would be when she told him her destination. Yuna thought that rather than convince him it would be quicker to act first.

While running through the corridors at a jog, Yuna suddenly looked out the window. The sun, which had just begun to wane, shone on the flower garden and dyed the whole surface a faint red. It was an indescribable and wondrous sight. When the sun sank completely and the area was wrapped in darkness, the season when torch bugs instead would bloom like flowers of light was close.

(But, for me...)

There was probably no more time.

She didn't know how long she had. But she was certain the "end" was approaching--that was the premonition she had.

She was scared. She was unbearably scared.

If she stopped once, she felt like she would be crushed by the fear of death. That's why, up to now, she had continued to avert her eyes from that feeling. She tried not to be conscious, as much as possible, to what it really meant to die.

However, a few days ago when she had suddenly lost consciousness, Yuna was confronted anew with "death". The moment she had let go of her consciousness, while she had no idea what was going on, an instinct passed by saying that this was her end now. In the end, it was her imagination but she couldn't help but think that there would certainly come a time when her groundless fear became reality.

(I can't fulfill the promise with Asyut.)

That promise of going to see the torch bugs together.

Yuna felt that, even if she still existed when the golden season for torch bugs was reached, she shouldn't stand beside Asyut. Because the promise held a completely different meaning from contact such as meeting him suddenly and having a friendly chat or sitting beside him at ceremonies.

(That's why I absolutely don't want to him to lose his sister.)

If, instead of her who couldn't be by his side, he had even just one more important person beside him. Yuna's wish for Asyut was only that. He had already walked a cruel life up to this point. And there would surely be various difficulties that waited him in the future, so it would be best that he had even just one more person to support him.

Asyut had lost his sister once.

That's why she didn't want him to lose her again.

Bracing herself and running through the corridors, by the time she noticed, Yuna had come near Linus' office.

She had crossed paths with many servants up to this point, but there was no one to question Yuna for acting alone. They were probably ill at ease to call out directly to the saint. Instead, there may be someone reporting to Asyut or Aeneas around this time.

Before she was brought back, she had to do what she wanted to do. Although her own power was small, it was better than doing nothing. It was with these thoughts that Yuna focused her mind once again and knocked on the door to Linus' room. –However.

The tall and sturdy door did not move at all, as if it were rejecting Yuna. She knocked

several times in succession but there was no response from inside. Was Linus absent? Yuna bit her lip and then someone called out to her from behind.

“Um, Lady Celiastina, do you have business with Lord Linus?”

It appeared to be a soldier who was assigned to the security around this area. Perhaps he was unable to just watch Yuna’s actions, and so he approached while looking slightly scared.

“You appear to be alone though.”

“Hey, do you know where Linus is? I have something urgent with him.”

Yuna asked the other person, interrupting them. Because she couldn’t do anything if she was brought back, she consciously imbued her voice with pressure.

“H-He has gone to a meeting.”

“Where is it?”

“I, um, do not know. I apologize though.”

“Did he leave the room a while ago?”

“Not very..... not more than an hour ago.”

As he answered, the ends of the soldier’s eyebrows steadily went downwards. Seeing his faint appearance, she felt apologetic for scaring him any further. Yuna gave up and started to back out when, this time, another person broke in.

“What seems to be the matter.”

He had an unfamiliar face but looked to be a civil official with quite a high position in the royal palace. The soldier, who had drawn closer to Yuna, took a step back with a look of relief when he saw the official. It was also convenient for Yuna. He might be a person knowledgeable about the affairs of the royal palace, since he purposefully called out to the saint on his way through.

“I heard that Linus went to a meeting but I don’t know the location of the meeting room.”

“Lord Linus, you say.”

The civil official showed a hesitant expression for a moment. –He knew.

“Please tell me. I want to see him immediately.”

“I apologize, but that’s...”

“You know, right? Please tell me.”

“Unfortunately, the king is also present at the meeting Lord Linus is attending. That meeting cannot be interrupted..... How about waiting for Lord Linus to return?”

The king, Ron, was also attending.

Was this a matter of everything working out as desired? Yuna felt more and more roused.

“Please tell me the location right now.”

“Lady Celiastina, please accept my apologies.....”

“I won’t ask you to guide me. And I’ll take full responsibility.”

Yuna declared this clearly, her back having been pushed by an unknown force. How long had it been since she spoke in a voice steeled from the bottom of her chest like this? Perhaps he was overwhelmed by Yuna’s force, but the other person was silent for a brief time before he opened his mouth in resignation.

“.....They are in the Great Scholar room, close to here.”

“Thank you!”

Yuna gave her thanks in a hurry and ran away immediately.

Yuna knew from before that there were several meeting rooms close to Linus’ office.

However, even though she knew about the meeting rooms, she didn’t know the names

of each room. Yuna had attended so many ceremonies, to the point of hating them, but she had no relation to meetings.

But Yuna didn't get lost. If the king was participating as well, she just needed to go to the door of the most decorated meeting room. With that anticipation, she headed to the place she was told. Sure enough, there was no need to carefully look at the door's quality; on both sides of the door to one room, there were two sturdy looking guards who stood at attention with spears in their hands.

Maybe they were there to clear people away because, when Yuna approached, she was sent a strikingly harsh look from them. However, as soon as they recognized her as the saint, they became spineless like a flat string. The guards looked at each other's face at the arrival of an unexpected person.

“Good afternoon.”

When Yuna walked up to them, saying that, the two lowered their heads slightly without saying anything.

“A meeting is happening right now, huh. Is the king inside too?”

There was no answer to that question. Unable to measure Yuna's intention, they must not be able to answer. But Yuna immediately knew that their silence itself meant an affirmation.

“Then I'll wait here until the meeting ends, since I'd like to talk to the king.”

This time the guards clearly revealed their dismay. She supposed that would be the case, since the saint was standing next to them and waiting for the meeting to end. They couldn't keep silent and watch the course of this event.

“Lady Celiastina, what matter do you have?”

One of them opened his mouth, as if he couldn't bear this any longer.

“Just a little something.”

“If you inform me of the matter, I may inquire on your behalf.”

Is what the other said.

“That’s okay, I’ll wait here until it ends. If it’s certain that the king is here, then I don’t need to hurry.”

“But to wait here in such a place...”

“Please don’t mind me. I won’t make myself a responsibility for you two.”

However, it seemed like this questioning and answering was heard from inside the room. Shortly thereafter, the door that looked like it wouldn’t open swung wide from inside the meeting room.

The figure that appeared was Linus.

“What is going on.”

As he said this his eyes stopped on Yuna’s form and even his eyes widened.

“Celia? What are you doing here.”

Beyond Linus’ shoulder, there were several people who looked over quizzically while remaining seated. At the very back of the room was- Ron. Only he did not show any perturbation and, rather, he looked at Yuna with interest.

Now that it became like this, it didn’t matter anymore.

“Excuse me.”

Yuna slipped past Linus and entered the meeting room.

It wasn’t as large of a room as she thought. There was a massive desk with its legs in the shape of lions between five people who were face to face with each other, including Ron. If Linus was included, that would make six people. All of the other men were treated with nearly the same treatment as the king, clad in clothes that did not compare unfavorably with the king. It seemed like, amongst them, Linus was the lowest rank.

These people were the pillars of authority in this country.

“This is a surprise.”

Ron, who was sitting back in his chair, said this without looking surprised.

“To see Lady Celiastina in such a place.”

“Sorry, but there’s something I wanted to talk about no matter what.”

Is that so, Ron said without breaking his calm composure.

“I apologize for there only being enough seats for those present. At the very least we should also stand but we are an old bunch, so would you allow us to sit and listen like this?”

Of course she didn’t mind, Yuna nodded. Linus closed the door and came back to stand behind Yuna.

“And, what has happened.”

“I would like you to call off the posting of the names of those in the anti-saint faction.”

Yuna broached the subject and got right to the point.

“I heard that there is chaos in the royal palace and the streets due to that posting. Because we are in this period, shouldn’t we avoid any unnecessary chaos.”

As far as Yuna could imagine, she intended that to be the best idea. However, Ron stared intently into Yuna’s eyes and, after keeping silent for a while, shook his head.

“Unfortunately, we cannot do that. It is because we are in this period that we decided to put up the notices.”

“What does that mean?”

“Celia, I will explain.”

Linus, who stood behind her, took a step forward and lined up beside her.

“You also must have heard the rumors on how the anti-saint faction’s activities have become a problem in the streets. Their handiwork has become violent nowadays.”

“.....Violent?”

“Yes. For example, making loud noises late at night or early in the morning in the residential areas to rant and rave about their displeasure towards the saint and the royal palace, throwing molotov cocktails into crowds without care, and things like that. Before they didn’t act in ways to trouble ordinary people, but it has gradually become more severe. Not just to the royal palace but also to the general public; the anti-saint faction is becoming a nuisance.”

“.....”

“And so we decided to disclose information on the anti-saint faction to the general public. Of course, the royal palace will settle them in the end but, even though they are ordinary people, there are many who want to protect themselves. Who is hiding in the towns as an anti-saint faction member; if they know that then it’s possible for them to deal with it on their own. Furthermore, as the number of people arrested and their names presented to the public increases, the towns will be all the safer.”

Linus’ point was easy even for Yuna to understand. Ron lit a fire under the bottom of the anti-saint faction and made them determined to attack the royal palace- that was what Asyut and the others said, but the goal of what Linus said might also be true.

But, even still, she couldn’t withdraw like this.

“Then, at least can’t you erase Milifaire’s name.”

Milifaire; all the men in the meeting room made an unpleasant expression at that name.

“I believe you already know but that is the name of Asyut’s younger sister. Even if it is certain that she is presently in the anti-saint faction, I don’t think it’s necessary to publicize that information. Wouldn’t that just invite unnecessary confusion.....”

“I understand quite well what you wish to say.”

Linus opened his mouth again but Ron gave a single nod, as if interrupting him.

“However, we cannot erase that name.”

“Why?”

“Because we absolutely cannot allow her to slip away.”

Yuna wasn't able to understand immediately and furrowed her brows.

"For example, you see, in regards to the people belonging to the extremes of the anti-saint faction, even if they escaped their influence would not be much. This may be a horrible way of saying it, but to put it plainly, I do not care if they were left alone. However, Milifaire comes from an upper class of aristocrats, is still a young woman, and previously a tragic figure. Those kind of humans are optimal to be elevated as a symbol of an organization."

In other words, Ron continued with a serious look in his eyes.

"If by any chance Milifaire were to be left at large, there is a fear that the organization will return to life centered on her. Unfortunately, even if the anti-saint faction is suppressed, it would be impossible to capture every single person. In that case, whether the remaining people will scatter or gather again depends on the presence or absence of the person who will be the "key"."

"But....."

"Lady Celiastina, please understand."

Ron rose on the spot and lowered his head.

"My way of doing things may not be said to be suitable for the path of a person."

Murmuring that, his eyes squinted slightly. Was he saying that not only the anti-saint faction, but also Milifaire's name was released to the public? Or was he saying that he was using the anti-saint faction to try and chip off the power of the priests-.

"However, I am also the king of this country. I must look ahead to the country and choose the "right" way to think as a king."

His tone was calm throughout everything. But in front of those words filled with legitimacy, Yuna lost sight of her rebuttals.

"But."

She was terribly angry at herself for only being able to get the word "But" out. Everyone who was watching Yuna had, at one point, turned sympathetic gazes towards her. However, there was no one who helped. Everyone in this place respected

Ron's thoughts and decided to follow them.

The side of Asyut's face was recalled. While being calm, it was like he gave up- but somewhere there was pain.

"What can I do to have you pardon them?"

"Pardon?"

"If they are caught as members of the anti-saint faction, what should I do to prevent them from being executed?"

Yuna could only clutch at straws now. There was nothing she could do but hope against hope.

"Lady Celiastina, please stop right there."

At that moment, one of the men who had kept silent and watched the proceedings until now opened his mouth. He also stood up and turned to Yuna firmly.

"My lady's mercy and overflowing consideration for others is something that most definitely echoes in our hearts. However, we cannot move the country swayed by emotions. We will deal appropriately with the anti-saint faction. I can only say this."

"That is correct. Lord Linus, please escort Lady Celiastina back to her room."

"Please wait."

Even though she tried to hang on when they all broke off the conversation, the men only shook their heads. In the end, Linus reached out with his hands and grabbed Yuna's shoulders tightly.

"Come on, Celia, let's leave it like this now. You came alone, didn't you. If you don't return soon, the people around you might worry."

"Linus, let go."

"I won't release you. Now, give up."

As he said that Linus pulled Yuna with great force to the door.

“Ron! Have you seen Asyut’s pained face? And it’s not just Asyut. There must be many who are enduring it with the same feelings. Please don’t continue this vicious circle anymore.”

“Lady Celiastina.”

Ron called out once more to Yuna, who was growing distant.

“The answer is not in me. It is in you.”

As soon as she tried to think of the meaning in those words.

The door was closed in front of her eyes.

“Good gracious, your actions utterly went beyond astonishment that I can’t help but be amazed.”

On the way back from the meeting room, Linus sighed while saying this.

Perhaps he was trying to cool Yuna’s head because he purposefully chose to walk down a drafty corridor. A comfortable breeze blew past Yuna’s skin and fluttered the hem of her one-piece dress.

The waning sunset was now nestled close to the horizon. The lit lamps that illuminated patches of the corridor intermittently were dim as if to comfort Yuna who passed by. The red of the sunset, which was brighter, illuminated Yuna’s profile clearly as she looked down.

Linus, who glanced at Yuna out of the corner of his eye, continued his words even further.

“To think that you would march into that meeting room by yourself. I suppose you heard about Milifaire from someone?”

Yuna nodded without any strength.

“How much did you hear?”

“Probably everything. From Asyut.”

“I see.”

Linus made a thoughtful face.

“However, he did not open his heart to you for you to do something unreasonable. Reckless actions will also hurt Asyut.”

“Was it reckless? To tell Ron my thoughts.”

“I wouldn’t say that your actions this time were reckless. But, if nothing is said to you, you look like you’ll do something even more outrageous.”

Yuna did not raise her lowered face and remained silent for a while.

“.....I.”

Her hand, which had been raised to hold back her hair from fluttering in the wind, clenched.

“I thought that Ron would understand.”

Ron, huh, Linus said as he turned that over in his mind.

“Because you and the king seem to have gotten along well, hm.”

“That’s because Ron told me what he thought towards the anti-saint faction. And he told me to act if there was something I could do. Yet, listening to what Ron said just now, he doesn’t seem to have any intentions to stop the anti-saint faction’s attack. I don’t know what Ron intended.”

“Did the king not say it clearly?”

Yuna finally raised her head at that.

“That the answer is in you.”

“What does that mean?”

“Who knows. Only that that person seems to expect you to do “outrageous” things.”

Linus looked down at Yuna and smiled widely.

“It’s pointless to think about persuading that person. What you yourself asked, about what you should do to prevent them from being executed; do not ask the king that, instead ask yourself and how about thinking it over once more?”

Yuna wondered if Linus, who said that, had a good method come to mind. She glanced up at him with a searching look, but Linus only shrugged his shoulders lightly as if he saw through to her thoughts.

“I will tell you now that I do not have any good ideas. It’s impossible for the anti-saint faction to be forgiven after attacking the royal palace- I can only think that. The king must think the same. But, if it’s you, there is a feeling of wondering if this situation can be overturned. Like the time with Duo previously.”

Duo; hearing that name Yuna reflected on the not-so-distant past.

It was around the time when Yuna was starting to become familiar with life as Celiastina. A young man, by the name of Duo, attacked Yuna to try and clear his resentment over his wife being irrationally killed.

Because he pointed a blade towards the saint, he was obviously sentenced to capital punishment. During that, many people, including Yuna, worked together to release him. Gathering an armful of signatures, his freedom was finally wrested.

The situation at that time and the situation this time was somewhat similar.

But it could also be said to be completely different.

At that time, it was a situation of individuals versus individuals. Thinking of Duo’s personal circumstances, it wasn’t strange for many people to appear in sympathy and raise their voices with the want to save him. However, this time it was a confrontation of organizations. Even if there were individual circumstances to consider, of the people who made up the anti-saint faction, if an action was taken to oppose the “country” as an “organization”, the movement to advocate that would be dramatically reduced. Ron had said that the country’s people were shocked due to the anti-saint faction’s raids and would criticize the country. But the number of people who would try and openly do something must be small. They sympathized with the anti-saint faction but there

was no helping if they were punished- there was no doubt that was the trend. If Yuna alone raised her voice, just how many people would agree with her?

“Well, it doesn’t seem like signatures will work this time.”

Linus muttered that as if speaking for what was inside Yuna’s heart.

There he stopped and turned around, as if he suddenly noticed something. Following him, Yuna also turned around and saw a person coming across the long corridor and rushing over here.

It was Aeneas.

“Lady Celiastina!”

His voice seemed to be squeezed out from the bottom of his chest. When he came up in front of her, Aeneas’ shoulders dropped and he placed both hands on his knees, trying to catch his ragged breaths.

“Look, Celia, it appears that you’ve caused quite the worry. You should apologize earnestly while he escorts you back.”

Linus said only this and lightly patted Yuna’s shoulder before taking his leave. Yuna eyed Linus’ back reproachfully but when she thought of the young man in front of her she hesitated to expressly detain Linus.

“.....Aeneas.”

Facing him once again, when she called out reservedly to him as he remained bent over, Aeneas finally raised his head- and glared at Yuna sternly.

“What exactly were you intending to leave your room by yourself!”

“S-Sorry.”

“You must understand how dangerous of a time it is right now. Moreover, you had just collapsed the other day.....”

Saying that, Aeneas shuddered as if he were horrified. It had been Aeneas who had watched right beside Yuna when she fell down onto the ground. Naturally, he would

worry over Yuna more than anyone else.

“I’m really sorry.”

Yuna could only apologize earnestly for that. It was herself who had taken actions that had no excuse.

“.....Why did you not call me? Is it because you thought it would be awkward from what happened before?”

“No, that’s not it. I had business where I suddenly wanted to see the king. I thought I needed to see him right away so I rushed out of my room without calling for you, Aeneas.”

While hastily rejecting that, Yuna was flustered inwardly. That’s right, she hadn’t faced Aeneas properly since she was confessed to. Yuna still hadn’t said her thanks for being carried after collapsing either and, in the first place, it was uncertain as to whether their conversation at that time had finished conclusively.

“.....Um, Aeneas, when I collapsed you were the one who looked after me, right. Thank you very much and I’m sorry for the late thanks. Also.....”

“That is enough. You do not have to speak.”

Aeneas nodded, as if saying he understood.

“I understand your feelings well, Lady Celiastina. The only request I have is that I would like you not to keep a distance from me. I do not want things to be awkward, Lady Celiastina. Please, treat me the same as you did up to now.”

“.....Okay.”

When she nodded obediently, Aeneas released the tension in his shoulders like he was relieved.

“I’m glad.”

And then the corner of his eyes relaxed slightly.

“Well then, have you finished your business already?”

“Mm, thank you. I’m okay now.”

“In that case, shall we return to your room.”

“That’s right.”

As she answered, Yuna was struck with a concern.

“Come to think of it, has it already been spread to everyone that I disappeared alone from my room?”

She was apologetic that it seemed to have become quite a fuss. When she asked Aeneas searchingly with these thoughts, he smiled wryly and replied “No”.

“The patrols that saw you in the corridors called out directly to me. After hearing what everyone had to say, I knew your location immediately, so I have not reported this to anyone yet.”

“I see, that’s good.”

“It is not good. I lost a year off my life.”

“Ack, y-you’re right. It’s not good, huh. I’m sorry.”

When she became flustered, Aeneas suddenly burst out laughing. Geez, Yuna expressed as she pouted. –Phew, Yuna was relieved inwardly. She was the same in that she didn’t want to be awkward with him. She had thought it selfish to treat him the same as before and so had felt to somewhat withdrawn, but if Aeneas also said the same thing then she was thankful.

No, maybe he was just speaking for Yuna’s feelings. So that he wouldn’t trouble her, or hurt her. Putting off his own feelings– because he was always thinking of Yuna first.

But still Aeneas wasn’t the one. Yuna’s heart had already decided on one.

Aah, a person’s heart was truly a mysterious thing. Yuna looked up at the sky, whose sun had mostly fallen, and said that to herself in her heart.

Several days later, Yuna understood through experience that the royal palace suddenly became busy.

Although she spent the majority of her day in her own room, whenever she participated in her many ceremonies, even in the short time of leaving her room and walking down the corridors, she could clearly sense that.

She wondered if it had anything to do with the names of the anti-saint faction posted up throughout the streets.

Frankly, thinking about the main causes, she could only come up with that.

She tried indirectly asking her maid, Nasha, about that but she didn't seem to know anything concrete. If it was Aeneas, then it looked like he would know something but Yuna, who recently had been nothing but trouble, was ashamed to make him worry by her having an interest in something strange again.

It was at this occasion that Yuna happened to come face-to-face with Siegcrest by chance at the infirmary.

These days it had become a daily routine for Yuna to come and water the asiatic jasmine and she was surprised to see the flashy and large man, far from the gentle atmosphere of the room, sitting on one of the beds.

“Sieg!?”

“Yo, Celia.”

Despite Yuna's surprise, he raised one hand in a carefree manner. When she saw that arm wrapped in white bandages, Yuna became more and more startled.

“W-What happened?”

“Ah, this? Nothing much.”

“Oh my, Lady Celiastina, good morning.”

Mislee, who poked her face out from the other side of the partitioning screen, welcomed Yuna with a cheerful smile.

“For you to be injured, Sieg...”

“Hey now, fighting is my occupation so one or two injuries isn’t anything to lose your mind about.”

“But.”

Yuna, who had never seen him injured enough to have bandages wrapped, was unable to suppress her unrest even while she thought that his point was plausible.

“I was just cut a little when I mediated a quarrel. It wasn’t anything where I needed to come here, but I heard you come often, Celia.”

“Me?”

Yuna tilted her head, staring at him in puzzlement.

“The other time, I had to end things vaguely during the middle of the talk. After that, I’ve been around dealing with many things so I left it like that, but I was curious.”

“Aah.....”

She recalled the conversation between the three of them, with Siegcrest and Asyut. It was none other than Siegcrest who told them that the names of the members of the anti-saint faction had been posted. And then he gave them a push to the back to talk firmly with each other.

“In the end, you heard the story from Asyut, right?”

Yuna gave a single nod when asked. It was then that another servant just so happened to come in to receive medical treatment, and so the two of them moved to the backyard of the infirmary.

“Ohh, so this is the asiatic jasmine that you’ve been taking care of. It’s pretty good looking, ain’t it.”

As soon as they went out into the garden, Siegcrest looked up at the lush climbing plant. Yes, the asiatic jasmine had already become tall enough to pass Siegcrest’s height. It was a growth that was unimaginable. Yuna also came to stand beside Siegcrest and she smiled at the sight of the “miracle” brought about by the saint. Its

buds were still hard but they were starting to increase by ones and twos.

“Sieg, thank you for that time. Asyut spoke about everything. What happened in the past, and his sister’s situation.”

“I see. That guy was finally in the mood to talk, huh.”

Actually, Siegcrest added with a mischievous smile.

“You know, even I don’t know exactly what happened to that guy in the past. Of course, I heard through the grapevine that it was a major incident but I’ve never heard it directly from that guy’s mouth. At that time, tons of rumors were flying about so even now I don’t know what the truth is.”

“Is that so.”

“Well, I knew he didn’t want to talk about it so I thought that was fine. But, still, I had the feeling he was about to reach his limit soon.”

“Limit.....”

“Yeah, he’s close to his limit. He’s a guy who stores up everything inside himself and doesn’t show weakness to people. That’s why it’s no use to force him to open his mouth. So, knowing this, it’s a good thing he felt like talking to you, Celia, with just a little push to his back.”

Siegcrest stretched wholeheartedly with a refreshed expression.

“.....But I can’t do anything. Nothing about Asyut’s sister.”

In contrast, Yuna hung her head despondent. She just discovered her powerlessness the other day.

“Oh, right, I heard you marched into where the king was and threatened him to erase Milifaire’s name.”

“W-Wha! How do you kno.....”

Hehehe, Siegcrest tried to stifle his laughter.

“I have connections too in my own way. Well, Asyut doesn’t know so don’t worry.”

“B-But!”

There had only been six people in that place, including Ron and Linus. Moreover, from Siegcrest’s words she felt like the facts had been exaggerated greatly.

“No, really, you’re amazing. When I heard that I was a bit exhilarated. The king is a guy who, once he’s seriously decided on something, he’ll never reverse it but there’s merit to just letting him have it too.”

She felt like that wasn’t something for him to openly praise to that extent. Especially if someone like Asyut knew about it, then he would blame himself again for being the cause.

“But, in reality, regarding the posting of names, the effects are beginning to appear immediately.”

Siegcrest crossed his arms as he said that.

“I don’t like the way the king is doing things, but there are people giving themselves up after seeing the posting.”

“Giving themselves up?”

Yuna asked that, repeating his words like a parrot.

“Yep. There are quite a few people who can’t live their lives after having their names exposed, so they’re going to the royal palace themselves. If they give themselves up before doing something big like attacking the royal palace then, for the time being, they’re exempted from the capital punishment. It seems like there’s been more than ten people already.”

Yuna nodded in comprehension. The choice of giving themselves up should have been a common thought but she had completely overlooked that. She had thought that everyone in the anti-saint faction was willing to die to confront the royal palace, but naturally there would be people who weren’t. Particularly, with the posting of names this time, there were those who were able to take another good look at their futures.

—In that case, maybe.

“Um, has Milifaire.....”

It wouldn’t be strange for her to appear personally at the royal palace. Yuna looked up at Siegcrest beside her with that hope, but he shook his head with a frown.

“Too bad but Asyut’s little sister hasn’t appeared yet. I’m guessing the king is also just aiming at half of them. It’s not gonna go that easily.”

Yuna’s shoulders fell. However, it was still too early to give up. There was more than enough of a possibility that if they became more and more cornered they would have no choice but to surrender. If she thought this way, putting aside the right or wrong of disclosing Milifaire’s name to the public at this time, it could be said that a good possibility was brought forth.

The rest was up to Milifaire’s feelings. Conversely, Yuna thought that if Milifaire’s resolve was firm to the point where she would not surrender even with this then- it would become an extremely large worry.

Yuna wished for Milifaire to appear somehow. Right now, she could do nothing but pray for that.

“Celia, you gotta be especially careful in the future too. Because the inside of the anti-saint faction is gonna be messed up by this action. It’s going to be really soon before they become desperate and attack the royal palace.”

Yuna stared at Siegcrest, holding her breath. These were words that had been said many times but, now that an actual movement has happened, it resounded and increasingly asserted itself.

“You didn’t come here alone, did you?”

“Don’t worry, Aeneas is waiting outside.”

Yuna answered, assuming an air of calm but she was inwardly startled. She felt like her selfish actions the other day were being seen through.

“That’s good then.”

Siegcrest nodded without pursuing that any further.

“Anyway, there’s just a bit more before everything happens. Though it’ll be tough again after everything ends..... at that time, Celia, you have to support Asyut.”

Siegcrest was surely saying that without a deep meaning, and Yuna should have answered “Yes” obediently. But her voice wouldn’t come. She wanted to support Asyut, she felt that more strongly than anyone else, but it was a wish that could not be granted.

How did he take Yuna’s silence? Siegcrest glanced at Yuna’s face but in the end said nothing about it.

“I have to return to the Order of Knights soon. If there’s trouble, tell me at anytime.”

Siegcrest placed the palm of his big hand on Yuna’s head.

Yuna was finally able to give a single nod.

# Chapter Eight

Inside a dim room, the gathered people sat on their knees breathing face-to-face.

The light of the flickering lamp in the center of this windowless room was unreliable. If someone were to sigh, it would readily abandon its job for certain.

“...Everyone is gathered here, huh.”

Ten people were gathered in all. Amongst them, an elderly man who looked to have seniority confirmed this while looking around slowly.

Milifaire watched this from a place that was a little ways apart from the circle.

It was a first experience for Milifaire to attend a meeting where the organization's managers gathered like this. Normally, the matters decided upon at this meeting came down to Milifaire at another meeting. Important decisions were made before she knew them. But this time was different.

“Still, the numbers have been reduced quite a lot.”

Someone muttered this quietly. There was no need to ask what they meant.

The other day, commencing from a corner of the royal palace, the names of members of the anti-saint faction was posted throughout town. The moment they realized they'd been had was already too late. The organization collapsed all too easily and quickly. Those who were caught and those who gave themselves up followed one after another, and a miserable situation descended on the organization. Also, the morale that had risen extremely high was brought low. People, who had lost their nerves thinking there was no way to attack the royal palace in this state, appeared and those who left the organization continued to increase every day.

Who exactly was it that passed information to the royal palace.

For Milifaire, she didn't know what to do with her anger.

They had tasted a hardship due to betrayal once before. It was during the plan to

attack the saint.

Milifaire had thought that plan was close to perfect. A man, serving as one of the saint's bodyguard, had come to their side. Wasn't his name Neisan? He too was also made to experience wandering between the boundary of life and death due to the past saint. She didn't know how he was able to get into the pocket of the saint but, thanks to that, the information they obtained was remarkably better and they were even able to obtain the absolute secret information about her traveling outside incognito.

The place the saint had gone to was the orphanage where she was born and raised. At first, they planned to attack the orphanage where the children were – Milifaire shuddered when she heard that later – but because the saint moved to a graveyard they quickly altered their plans accordingly. They used one of their young members well, even used the grave keeper, and reached the point where they were one step away from being able to assassinate the saint. That plan, where everything had gone so well due to the activity of the anti-saint faction, would probably never happen again in the future.

However, that plan of attack, the success right before their eyes, all turned to nothing.

They were betrayed by the man who should have changed sides to them – no, looking back now, he probably hadn't changed sides to the anti-saint faction from the beginning. It was all a mistake to let their guard down at the accuracy of the information he brought and his actions. However, on the other hand, according to the results of his past that they investigated thoroughly, there was no mistake that he saw hell due to the saint. This was nothing more than an excuse but she could only think he was mad to still follow the saint's side.

Anyway, this time they had to taste the same regret again.

The royal palace's way of doing things was quite nasty. But maybe they had to be like that to be fine with folding up around that Saint Celiastina.

–Just what we want.

Milifaire remembered Ghada, the one who managed the anti-saint faction, muttering that.

They would show the king and the saint that their feelings weren't so minor as to give up at this extent. Milifaire had nodded firmly at those words of his. Yes, from the start

they didn't think about leaving something behind. Even if all their information was leaked, or all their weapons were taken and they were made unarmed, their goal was unchanged.

“Let's hurry and confirm everything.”

A quiet but well-heard voice entered Milifaire's ears and she came to her senses.

In the center of the circle, Ghada sent a strong gaze towards her. Milifaire received that and tightened her own expression.

“We will move our plans one day earlier and carry out the attack tomorrow... I will say this plainly, we have no chance of winning. I don't think we can even scratch the saint's face. However, we will show them our will. It is with that resolution that we will all unite together and attack from the front.”

The men nodded in silence.

“But Milifaire is the only exception.”

Ghada added that and, for the first time, the air in the place wavered.

“It is the wish of the person herself, and I have allowed her to act separately.”

“Wish of the person herself? What do you mean.”

The flustered men looked between Ghada and Milifaire's faces.

“I have said that we won't be victorious, but we will do everything that we can. This was a decision for that sake.”

Yes.

If there was something she could do, then she would carry it out with all her strength. Instead of Ghada, Milifaire began to tell everyone the plan she came up with herself.

The meeting ended and Milifaire and the others exited the room one by one, leaving space in between. On the surface this building was a brothel and it'd be suspicious if a

large number of people exited.

With the appearance of a woman in that store who had just finished working, Milifaire stepped into the deserted back alley and nearly screamed when her shoulder was suddenly grabbed from behind. When she turned back after swallowing down that almost-scream there was the familiar face of Jin.

“What the, don’t surprise me!”

“Hey, Milifaire. I’ll be going with you tomorrow too.”

“...What did you say?”

“Ghada has accepted that too. Nothing will change much if one person becomes two people.”

“But.”

“Will it be inconvenient if I’m there?”

“That’s not it at all.”

There Milifaire suddenly showed a self-derisive smile.

“You think I’m going to lose my nerve and run away? You and Ghada.”

“Ghada trusts in you.”

Milifaire looked up into Jin’s calm eyes as he stood right beside her. A rather chill wind blew through the narrow alley. It was a night where the moon shone brightly but, in the long shadows cast by the tall buildings, she couldn’t see Jin’s expression very well.

“Hey, where is that hatred of yours born from?”

Jin, uncharacteristically, asked that in a tone as if he were talking to a young child.

“...What do you mean.”

“I’ve always thought this since the time I heard about your past. Aren’t you— just under the impression that the hatred your brother must be holding is your own.”

Milifaire squeezed the baggage she had in her arms tightly. The slight tremble in her hands was no doubt due to her anger against Jin.

“Are you... insulting me?”

“I’m only saying what I feel. Even I don’t think you’ll lose your nerve at this point and run. But if you have to face your brother tomorrow... I’m thinking that I don’t know what’ll happen at that time.”

Milifaire opened her mouth to refute that immediately, but in the end she couldn’t say anything. Were these feelings not her own? Was she just convincing herself?

—That was... impossible.

Milifaire told herself that.

No, it was nothing to tell herself. At any rate, Milifaire was still unable to understand her older brother’s decision. There was no way she could understand his thoughts when he chose to stay as the First Holy Knight and stay beside Celiastina after that event.

This was unmistakably her own anger and her own hatred.

She would make that clear when tomorrow came and when the time of the raid came. It would be nice if that moment could come as quickly as possible— Milifaire thought that along with a strange impatience.

Beyond Jin the glowing moon rose high in the sky. Even though it was probably the last moon she would look up at, it released a light that was cold in all respects.

# Chapter Nine

Recently here, the number of guards had rapidly increased.

Asyut thought that as he briskly walked down a corridor wide enough to fit three carriages lined up side by side.

In the royal palace, a person was able to find soldiers carrying weapons no matter where they looked. Even this large corridor was the same. Here was one person, over there was one person, and further beyond was another person. This strict security was rampant throughout the royal palace.

By this time, two weeks had passed since the names of the anti-saint faction's members had been released to the public. The disorder that triggered in the royal palace did not show any signs of calming in the least. Already the number of those who gave themselves up was reaching thirty soon and, in addition, the number of those caught by reports from the common people was increasing steadily. With this, it was calculated that nearly twenty percent of the anti-saint faction's people had been caught. It was natural for the royal palace side to think that half of the remaining members would become desperate and attack the royal palace.

As the security within the royal palace was strengthened on the king's orders, the female servants were able to stand by at home if they wished. Joint training had also begun with three troops of different ranks: the Order of Holy Knights, the Order of Knights, and the army. Even the western side of the royal palace, which until now had been comparatively free for people to come and go, began to confirm identities strictly. As a result, the West Royal Library that had been open to the common people was temporarily closed- and so on. The effect of the anti-saint faction spread in every direction and the regular scenery of the royal palace completely changed.

The majority of the soldiers were ordered to stay in the royal palace, and secretly voices rose about how "Now that it's come to this, I want the anti-saint faction to hurry up and come". Of course, such frivolous talk wasn't heard around Asyut's surroundings – people throughout the royal palace already knew of the painful position he was put in – but gossip about the anti-saint faction heard on the wind never ended.

“Lord Asyut, good morning.”

He was greeted by a young man dressed in an unfamiliar uniform as they passed each other. The jacket was a dark blue cloth with golden embroidery added on. He was a knight that belonged to the Order of Holy Knights. Normally the Order of Holy Knights were only allowed to wear white uniforms, but actually this dark-colored uniform also existed. When they were actually going to battle then they would wear this dark blue one. However, as this opportunity had not existed in these past ten years, there were many who did not know that the Order of Holy Knights had two kinds of uniforms. In such times, for the dark blue uniform to be allowed to be worn – it was a small act but a large change.

“There hasn’t been anything strange in particular, has there?”

“Yes. Currently, it is quiet.”

“I see. But I would ask of you to continue without dropping your guard. Once a small change occurs, a large current will follow immediately.”

“Understood. I will bear that in mind.”

The young knight nodded seriously and then left. Casually seeing off that back, Asyut resumed walking. He had been ordered by the king to walk around the royal palace personally and report the situation to the king, and so he sharpened his senses so as to not miss any slight disturbances and looked around his surroundings. The king feared needless chaos within the royal palace due to the anti-saint faction’s attack more than he did the attack of the anti-saint faction itself.

(According to the schedule, there’s three more days until the raid.)

Three days. A long time that seemed short. A short extension of time that seemed long.

The date of the raid on the royal palace had become clear because of the intelligence brought from the king’s spy. However, the anti-saint faction may no longer stick to the decided date. To them, with their scattered and internal chaos, no matter when they carried out their attack the result they would obtain would not change.

Yes, they no longer had a future. And they themselves should know that best. Nevertheless, that they hadn’t given themselves up meant that the will of the remaining members was immeasurable. Amongst the many who were arrested for

taking the anti-saint faction's actions as a political "exhibition", the remaining members were purely those with vengeance who risked their lives to retaliate against the saint and royal palace.

The fact that his little sister was also participating still weighed heavily on Asyut. While he imagined the scene of Milifaire standing in front of him with an awkward expression countless times, that scene still had not become a reality. With things the way they were, he would have to oppose his sister, his one and only blood relative—what a nightmare. However, the stage where he thought about locate his sweet and pure sister had long passed. From the moment Linus thrusted Milifaire's present condition at him, he keenly felt the possibility that the next time he saw her would be when he stood facing off against her as an enemy. That was something that he himself could not accept more than anyone else. But, even if he averted his eyes, that "time" would certainly come.

Unable to hide his dark expression, Asyut looked down as he began to descend the stairs. When he looked out a large window that stretched vertically, the tranquil scenery of a flower garden spread beyond the window. Even though a battle running with blood might start soon, as long as he looked at this scenery, he could only think of it as a joke of some sort.

(Don't drop your guard.)

Asyut took the lines that he had said to the knight just now to his own heart. Especially in his case where if he relaxed then it would be the very end; it seemed like the strength would leave his body and he wouldn't be able to get up.

"Ser Asyut, what are you doing in such a place."

Asyut, who had been glaring out the window at some point, snapped back to his senses when he was suddenly called out to. Looking up from the bottom of the stairs, and the one who called out, was an old man clothed in long priest robes, Roblin.

"Father Roblin."

Even as Asyut responded by saying his name, inside he wanted to act like he hadn't noticed and leave. In particular at this time, it was a very depressing duty to have to deal with an obstinate priest who opposed the king's side. Like the meeting that had been held before, it was easy to imagine him arguing vehemently, half-shouting, with

Asyut.

“Is something the matter?”

Saying that, Asyut descended the stairs. However Roblin, who had been waiting, only opened his mouth partly with a sullen expression.

“Recently, the royal palace has completely changed.”

“Yes, you are right. I suppose because there has been a move to suppress the anti-saint faction in earnest.”

Like how you quite especially wished for, but Asyut didn’t say that.

“They are thorough preparations. To an extent that makes one feel unbearable.”

“...Is that so.”

Not having anything to answer with, Asyut spoke ambiguously.

“The anti-saint faction are also pitiful people. Even knowing they are dancing on the king’s palm they do not know the way to stop dancing.”

Good gracious, Roblin muttered as if finding it foolish. Asyut stared at him in secret. – Was he aware of the king’s intention again?

“The responsibility for leaving the crazed saint unregulated is undoubtedly with us priests as well. However, I would not have thought in my dreams to use even the madness of the saint as a personal tool like that king. A saint is a saint. To us, they are absolute entities.”

Perhaps that had been where they were wrong, Roblin sighed deeply. It was the first time this man had shown words that could be taken as weak.

“Maybe it was the duty of us priests to have remonstrated the saint much earlier. –As Sister Yodel tried to do.”

A beautiful priestess who was not here right now. Unlike the other exclusionary priests, she struggled to proactively head out and create bonds with her surroundings. And then finally trying to stop Saint Celiastina by dirtying her own hands; she was a

unique being as a priest.

More than half a year had already passed since she left the royal palace. If she was here now, Asyut wondered how exactly she would take this situation.

“However, even if we regret, nothing will begin. We will protect the saint in our own way. Even if we remonstrate her, we cannot abandon her. To abandon the saint is to abandon our faith. Even if the king uses the saint as a convenient pawn, we will preserve her sanctity.”

Roblin’s quiet composure did not crumble. It was Asyut’s first time witnessing him be this calm and talking so deliberately. In the first place, Roblin never attempted to talk properly in front of him. Roblin had always looked down on him as being a young man who understood nothing.

Why did Roblin feel like talking about this? What did he mean by preserving her sanctity?

Asyut was unable to ask about that. Before Roblin’s strong will, he had lost sight of his own words. Roblin snorted and, as if he had lost interest in Asyut, took his time in leaving.

“Hey, Asyut!”

Asyut, who was ruminating over Roblin’s words in his head while he walked, noticed a familiar voice calling out to him and turned around, somewhat relieved. In the passage that continued to the training ground, Siegcrest came towards him while raising a large hand.

“Sieg.”

“What are you doing, you’re late. The Order of Holy Knights’ meeting is about to start soon.”

“Ah, my bad.”

The two lined up and resumed walking at the same time. Once the meeting with the Order of Holy Knights ended, next was one with the Order of Knights, and then the

army, and then later he would go and explain the situation to the king. Furthermore, upon returning to his office, he needed to take care of his regular work that had been accumulating.

In truth, he wanted to go and see Celiastina. At last, in the present state where a raid was imminent, she had been mostly confined to her room. Her daily ceremonies had been narrowed down to only the truly important ones, and the people she could meet were more limited than ever. It was already unreasonable to turn up at the infirmary for the plant she had begun to raise and, even apart from that, whenever she left the room there was a thoroughness of having her bring Aeneas, along with a few others as bodyguards. Under these circumstances, even she would keenly feel that the attack of the anti-saint faction was approaching in front of them.

(As long as she doesn't do anything reckless.)

That was one of Asyut's concerns.

She had been informed of the scenes behind the anti-saint faction assault from the king, and she was thinking of wanting to save them somehow. There shouldn't be anything that even she could do, but she might not have completely given up yet.

(At any rate, above all, we must avoid exposing Lady Celiastina to danger.)

It must be boring to be confined to her room, but she just needed to keep still for a little while longer. That was all he wished for.

"Still, we've made all sorts of preparations it feels unbearable."

Siegcrest shook his head in exasperation while wearing his usual worn white uniform.

"It makes me wonder if we need to go this far."

"...More importantly, that uniform of yours."

"What? It's not like I'm not allowed to wear white, yet."

Siegcrest threw a glare at Asyut beside him.

"When I wear that blue one, it feels like I'm about to fight and that's not good."

“Well, blue doesn’t suit you.”

“Shut up, leave me alone.”

While they cracked jokes, Asyut felt like he understood Siegcrest’s thoughts. Siegcrest personally wasn’t one to fear fighting, but he was being considerate of the eyes in his surroundings. He didn’t want the servants and officials to be uneasy and wonder whether a battle was going to break out soon by walking around the castle in a uniform that was different than usual.

“Roughly speaking, the number of people in the anti-saint faction isn’t enough to reach two hundred. So, what’s with this talk about bringing in the country’s armies to battle to oppose them.”

“Don’t say anything at this point.”

But, Siegcrest protested by pouting. However, it was true that the scale of this uprising was one that could be easily settled with the army, or at most the Order of Knights. That this wasn’t done was solely because of the will of the king.

“It is the king’s plan, as he wishes to prevent any harm to the side of the royal palace. Moreover, the arrangement is to meet the enemy at the entrance of the main gate. The eyes of the common people will be there, so we should try to capture as many alive as possible. If we shed too much blood then we will provoke unnecessary animosity from the people.”

“The king’s plan, huh.”

Siegcrest muttered that, unamused.

“That’s quite something.”

“...You’re like Father Roblin.”

“What?”

“No, nothing.”

A dozen knights were already in the training ground by the time they arrived. They were commanding officers who managed four units each belonging to the Order of

Holy Knights. Everyone was talking to each other as they pleased but, when Asyut and Siegcrest entered, they naturally gathered close to the entrance.

“You’re here. This is everyone then, hm.”

The one whose voice was raised and carried across was the leader of the Order of Holy Knights, called Vansaider. A man who was in his late thirties but still led the country’s greatest and most adept knights; a man who, on top of being sharp and able, was a skilled swordsman. He knew Asyut from when Asyut was young and was one of Asyut’s few trusted friends.

“Well, let us start this meeting without delay.”

When he announced that, the air in the area transformed into one with tension. There was no table or chairs, only a massive training ground. However, there was no one who complained. Everyone in this place was an upper class aristocrat but, for those who had undergone the Order’s severe training, they couldn’t care less about being comfortable at this meeting.

Yes, the Order of Holy Knights were not just a decorative army.

The king was trying to show that both inside and outside with the conflict this time.

—How wily, the words of Siegcrest came to mind.

“According to the information from a certain source, the assault has been reported earlier to be three days away. However, there is more than enough of a possibility for it to happen before or after those days, so keep this information firmly in your minds.”

Vansaider began to talk while looking at the documents in his hand.

“There will be eighty people in groups of twenty from the Order of the Holy Knights, deployed at the front. There will also be eighty people from the Order of Knights, deployed in the rear. The army will provide assistance around; they will look at the amount of people and respond according to the circumstances.”

Everyone nodded silently. They had already been notified of these postings.

“The clash with the anti-saint faction is expected to be at the entrance of the main gate. All other gates will be closed and security will be carried out by the Order of Knights.

If, by any chance, the anti-saint faction were to go around then we must cope with that swiftly. We will move with purpose to secure everyone on the spot."

"What about the impact on the surrounding residents?"

One commanding officer raised their voice.

"Regarding that, the Order of Knights and the Civil Guards will cooperate and deal with it. Our duty is to subjugate the anti-saint faction as quickly as possible without using unnecessary force."

There Siegcrest, who had been silent, opened his mouth.

"One more thing. What about securing Milifaire?"

All the commanding officers on the spot suddenly held their breath.

"—The utmost priority. See to her safety first."

Vansaider answered that without hesitation.

"Understood."

Receiving that answer, Siegcrest nodded with satisfaction. Asyut, grateful for Vansaider's consideration, also nodded in silence. Now that Milifaire did not seem like she would give herself up, her participation in the assault could likely not be avoided. In that case, at the very least, he would secure Milifaire himself. Asyut secretly hardened his resolve to participate in this battle.

The bustling day was finally about to come to an end.

The sun had set entirely and it was around the time when the stars in the whole sky became a veil that covered the night sky. Asyut finished his work from start to end in a hurry and left his office at last.

As he returned to his private room he could see the figures of guards from time to time, even in this hallway which would normally be empty of people. While he passed through, giving words of appreciation for their work, he suddenly thought about

Celiastina.

How was that person spending this night?

Once he thought that, his feelings overflowed for her to the extent where he could no longer stop them.

-He wanted to see Celiastina.

Not thinking anything complicated, he just wanted to be close to her side. Even if they did not exchange words or anything, it was enough just to stay next to her. Just how satisfied would he be with only that. As if the problem of the anti-saint faction, the discord between his sister, the meaning of the words "Until the last moment" that Celiastina murmured- could be settled without thinking... without thinking about anything.

(I must be tired.)

Asyut shook his head lightly and scolded himself.

At this most important time, he wasn't in the position to let his mind wander. That was what he told himself. He knew full well that problems would not be settled even if he averted his eyes from them. No matter how painful it was, it was important that he first turned his eyes directly onto it.

(I know that.)

However, there were certainly things that were impossible to do by reason alone. The feelings of wanting to see Celiastina right now was one of those. If he wanted to think of a reason to meet her, countless ones came to mind. Like whether she was being obedient in her room, whether she was troubled by anything, or whether her health was really better after that incident... but it was as if there was no point in these excuses- He just wanted to see her.

(Once this anti-saint faction matter calms down...)

He would talk to Celiastina properly once more. So that she would open her heart about all the pain she had been carrying. And so that they could overcome this problem together with the two of them.

Just a little bit more.

Asyut said this to himself and continued walking down the long corridor back to his private room.

# Chapter Ten

What awaited Yuna when she woke up the next morning was the tremendous tension that had been here lately.

The royal palace was soon to be attacked by the anti-saint faction. That being said, she had been told a few days ago to try and not leave her room as much as possible. At that time, there was already more than enough of an atmosphere of being heavily guarded but Nasha still came every day to her room, as usual, and she participated in general ceremonies.

However, this morning, even that ordinary day was completely lost.

First, the person who came to wake Yuna was different from usual. Usually it was Nasha, or another maid came, but this morning she saw an old man she had never met before. He placed a tray with a set of Yuna's clothes and a water bucket to wash her face on a shelf near the entrance, without entering the room, before he withdrew in haste.

Although Yuna felt an inexplicable sense of being out of place, she washed her face, changed her clothes, opened the curtains of her room herself, and combed her hair. When she wondered what would happen with breakfast, before long the person who carried it over was a male waiter that, again, she was seeing for the first time. The man silently prepared breakfast and Yuna, who also silently watched that, could not endure the suffocating air anymore and tried talking.

"Um, this is our first time, right? Having you attend to me like this."

"Yes. I sincerely apologize for a man like me entering your chambers."

"Ah, no, I don't mind that at all."

The waiter continued while arranging the table with nimble motions.

"It is likely this will only be for today, and so I beg your pardon."

Only for today? Yuna tilted her head at those words. What exactly did that mean.

-No way.

“What’s going on outside right now?”

He didn’t answer that question, only glancing at Yuna with a troubled gaze.

“Nothing has happened- yet.”

“Then you mean something is about to happen.”

“My apologies, but I...”

He must have been warned not to say anything unnecessary. The waiter pressed his lips together tightly and did not say anything more as he poured a glass of water with careful actions. Because he had quite a tight-lipped atmosphere, it seemed pointless to try and force information out of him. Moreover, even without forcing him to open his mouth, her guess was unlikely to be wrong.

Yes, the anti-saint faction were finally going to act.

(It’s come at last.)

If this was the case, then she didn’t have time to leisurely eat her breakfast. Yuna stood up immediately.

“I’m going to check the situation outside.”

“Y-You cannot.”

“Well, I can’t stay still in this room. The anti-saint faction’s target should be me, so I need to go.”

“It is precisely because their target is you... You understand, right?”

At that moment an admonishing voice leapt out at Yuna, who was about to run out even now. -It was not the waiter. When she looked towards the door, it was just as Linus sauntered into the room.

“L-Linus.”

Yuna called out that name while feeling nervous. Linus, who was called, briefly told the waiter that he could withdraw now. After he saw off the waiter who left the room as ordered, he turned to face Yuna again.

“I’m glad I came to check on you ahead of time. Good gracious, you are a terrifying child, Yuna. For trying to throw yourself into the tiger’s cave.”

Although it was a calm voice, there was a compelling power. Yuna continued standing still on the spot and looked up at Linus, at a loss.

“...Linus.”

“A no is a no, even if you call my name like that. You cannot leave this room.”

His eyes were serious. Yuna realized that he would never bend no matter how she pleaded.

“What in the world are you able to do if you stood in front of the anti-saint faction? At best, you would be getting in everyone’s way.”

He was right. She knew that. She knew that to a painful degree, but.

“Has the anti-saint faction come to that point already?”

“Most likely. But we haven’t seen them yet.”

“...There’s really going to be a fight.”

Linus gave a shrug at Yuna’s murmur.

“The attack should have been the day after tomorrow according to the schedule at the outset, but it appears to have been quickened. This must mean they are at the limits of their endurance as well. It’s unlikely they’ve come to surrender either.”

“And Milifaire?”

“In the end, it doesn’t seem like she’s among the people who gave themselves up.”

As she thought, huh. The present state of affairs, remaining in its worst situation, was greeting them now at this moment. Without any paths being opened, without any

hope being found-.

"I don't understand the reason for why you suffer that much. Well, I suppose if we say this is characteristic of you then there is that. In any case, if you wish to contribute somehow to everyone, then it's best to stay still in this room. Do you not think it would be a heartening encouragement, more than anything else, for Asyut and the people of the royal palace to have you be in a safe place."

Certainly, it was as Linus said. It was best for everyone if she stayed quiet and obedient rather than act poorly. -She knew that, she knew that.

But, even if her head understood, Yuna couldn't stop the aching of her feelings. Her body, and her heart, tried to break into a run without permission.

"Listen, Yuna."

Linus called out her name with a noticeably stern voice and peered intently into Yuna's eyes.

"Once everything is concluded, I will come pick you up again. However, until then, do not leave this room."

-Linus, please. She opened her mouth, wanting to plead like that, but instead only a deep sigh came out. While watching him turn his back and leave in a daze, she cursed her powerlessness from the bottom of her heart.

If she had power. Yuna hugged her trembling body tightly. If she had power, then she could act following these feelings of her. And even with Linus as her opponent, she would be able to go through her ideas with a resolute attitude.

But she couldn't do that. She didn't even have that capability.

Yuna couldn't do anything but watch, with crazed feelings, as the door to her room closed quietly.

†

-It was quiet.

It was too quiet.

How much time had passed since then.

Yuna sat in her chair, without the slightest movement, and stared motionlessly into the air.

She didn't know what to do with these earnest feelings that should be called anger which simmered and welled up towards herself. The breakfast that had been prepared for her grew cold, and even her body gradually started to tire from holding the same posture for a long time.

She wondered what exactly was happening outside

In this room that was in the depths of the royal palace, she was isolated entirely from the outside world. Not a single sound was heard; only a terrifyingly quiet passage of time as usual.

She wondered if the anti-saint faction had finally arrived.

She wondered if they exchanged blows with the royal guards and if they were already captured.

She wondered if Asyut had faced Milifaire.

She wondered if there were people who lost their lives in this battle--.

Yuna bit her lip harder and harder.

(Am I really okay with this?)

Once more she reflected on this question that she had asked herself several dozens of times during this time. The answer that was returned from within her mind was the same fixed one of "It's inevitable", and that was all.

It was inevitable. The reason why was because she was just a girl without any power.

Even if she acted on her feelings, she would only be a burden to everyone. Everything was properly planned and suitable people were dealing with it. It was obviously best to leave everything to them.

(But I'm sure I'll regret it.)

A single drop fell in her chest.

(No, I'm already regretting it. I'm really– terribly regretting it.)

Towards herself who was just sitting here without doing anything.

(Because I know.)

That drop which trickled down, in the blink of an eye, created huge waves that spread in her chest.

(I know how everyone feels. Ron, Asyut, Linus, Siegcrest, the people of the royal palace, the townspeople– and the anti-saint faction too.)

Everyone was acting on the thought that “It’s inevitable”.

No one was trying to move looking forward. They turned their heads down, clenched their teeth, and walked on the “inevitable” road. They could only do that. Because there was no other way apart from that.

(I want to hold back the anti-saint faction, I don’t want them to fight with the royal palace. I don’t want Milifaire to be lost to Asyut. I don’t want anyone... anyone to die.)

There was no one who acted for that, who thought that from the bottom of their heart.

Only her.

There was only her.

Yuna stared forward and slowly blinked.

Breathing in deeply, she quietly exhaled.

-Alright.

(Let's go.)

It was certainly a decision that could only be called reckless.

But, in the end, Yuna was unable to wait and let everything pass like this. It may already be too late. Everything might have already ended. But even still, Yuna decided to go.

She stood up straight from the chair and headed directly to the door of the room. She tried the doorknob, but of course it was locked. It didn't seem to be a lock that could be opened from the inside. Shaking the knob with a dull sound, she realized that was pointless, and this time knocked on the door itself harshly.

“SOMEONE'S OUTSIDE, RIGHT? PLEASE, OPEN THIS!”

She knocked over and over again to the point her arms hurt. She raised a loud voice, from the depths of her body, to plead through the door to the guards who would be in the hallway, but there was no presence of anyone moving.

“OPEN THIS, I'M ASKING FOR THIS TO BE OPENED! –PLEASE!”

In this short time, she thought her throat would dry up. Even her arms had turned red. However, no matter how excessively she pounded on the sturdy door it didn't give an inch and only looked down at Yuna heartlessly.

“SOMEONE COME!”

There was no one who received the shout she made with all her might.

Yuna glared at the door while breathing hard for a while.

And then she turned around abruptly on her heel and crossed the large room. She slammed open the doors that led to the balcony and rushed out like that.

An entire field of flower gardens on the ground floor leapt into her eyes.

Yuna felt the back of her eyes grow hot all at once at this gentle scenery, unchanged even at this time. –No, now wasn’t the time to cry.

Somehow she scolded herself and then looked around at her surroundings. If she was to slip out of her room, it could only be from this balcony. But there was only a simple white table and chairs and several flowerpots here. She couldn’t find anything that could be used.

(If I jump from here without using anything, it’s not going to end with me being uninjured, huh.)

She leaned forward over the handrails and tried peering down. This room was on the third floor. However, because each floor of this building had high ceilings, it felt even higher than that.

(Even if I try tying the curtains and hanging them down... it’s no good, is it.)

Turning back, she looked at the curtains that were swaying in the light breeze. No matter how she estimated it, she didn’t think it would reach the floor but a length that went part of the way might be better than nothing. Yuna ran over to the door and tried yanking at the curtains but, as to how it was fastened, she couldn’t remove it from its rail at all.

“Argh, enough.”

Giving up on the curtains she vented on, Yuna moved towards the balcony again. She hung her body out over the balcony like she did before- and this time noticed the protrusions on the wall.

Could she escape by using this small protrusion that stretched across the wall, parallel to the ground, as a foothold? If she could walk along the wall somehow, then at least she could slip out from this room.

(I wonder if it’s impossible. It might be impossible.)

The idea she came up with wasn't one that could be called a good idea. Indeed, the width of the protrusion was enough for a person's foot to be placed on it, but even a child would seem to understand just how dangerous of an action it was for a normal person to walk on top of that. If she missed a step, she would fall to the ground head first and probably lose her life.

“.....”

However, she couldn't find any other way.

Yuna tightly closed her mouth that had parted unconsciously.

(...I have no choice but to try.)

In the exact moment she nervously tried climb over the balcony's handrails together with her grim decision.

“Please wait.”

A quiet male voice came down from overhead.

“Huh?”

Yuna reflexively raised a wild voice and turned her head up. Looking up she saw the fourth floor's balcony and someone who seemed to be examining her from there. Who in the world that was, due to the backlight she couldn't see their face- but during the time she was thinking this, that human shape threw their body forward. Before she even had the time to think, the man's body left the balcony and he was in the air.

She stiffened, unable to make a sound, and then the man landed in front of Yuna with a lightness that made her wonder if it was possible he had wings. As she took a long hard look at this unexpected figure, Yuna's eyes widened.

“Ne... Neisan.”

No way, no way.

Why was he here.

Facing the figure who she hadn't seen in a long time, Yuna's mind went blank.

“It has been a long time.”

That even voice without emotion remained the same. Even that somewhat unreliable tall and thin body, and those eyes which had a strange color- it was the appearance she saw before.

“Wh, why.”

“I came for you.”

“For me?”

Yes, Neisan said with a nod.

“If you so wish, I will take you... It seems it is unnecessary to test your will now.”

“But, why.”

He, who once wandered the boundary between life and death due to the violence from the past Celiastina. After he survived, he took up the role of being Yuna's bodyguard, but underneath he also had a connection to the anti-saint faction. And then, just when Yuna thought she fell into a predicament, he saved her from there. Neisan's behaviour could be seen as inconsistent, but everything originated from one thought.

—Even while I hate you, I found “something” in you that wasn't just detestable. And I want to know its true identity...

“Because I cannot understand “you” precisely yet.”

Neisan quietly answered.

“.....”

Yuna looked up at Neisan with wavering eyes. This person was a really strange person. Even though he could raise a hand against Yuna whenever he wished, he did not do so and even now appeared in order to lend Yuna his strength.

Ah, but.

“No, hold on. If you bring me out of here, you'll be charged with a crime again, Neisan.”

Even at the best of times, the royal palace had eyes on him. In the first place, it was admirable how he came all the way to the saint's private rooms in this state of high alert. Although last time Neisan took action according to his own personal will, no matter the circumstances, there was no way he could sacrifice his body again.

“There is no problem.”

However, Neisan said that carelessly.

“Because this is also according to King Ronbarno’s plan.”

“—What.”

Hearing an unexpected name from this unexpected person, Yuna’s voice cracked.

Just how many times was she supposed to be surprised. To think he was saying that Ron was getting involved.

“What do you mean? Ron... the king asked you to bring me out, Neisan?”

“It was not that I was asked. It was that it would be fine if I wished to do so. Only, I have always been acting with the king’s orders. Even during the period I concealed myself inside the anti-saint faction.”

“That’s...”

Then he didn’t sneak into the anti-saint faction on his own decision?

“After I saw a favorable opportunity and broke out of the organization, I coordinated with another person and was assigned to gather intelligence... That gentleman is truly thoroughly prepared.”

It didn’t seem like Yuna could be surprised any more than this.

“However, as far as you are concerned, I believe the king has feelings similar to my own. He is interested in the path you are opening up.”

That is why he would like you to act on your feelings and thoughts without restraints. Neisan said that in a plain voice.

“Now, Lady Celiastina, there is no time anymore. It is about time for the anti-saint faction to arrive at the main entrance of the royal palace. –Please give me your hand.”

†

When we approached the gates, the angry roars of people clearly filled the area.

The sharp noise of sword clashing with sword. Rising clouds of dust- and the faint drifting odor of blood.

The battle had already begun.

Yuna covered her head with a brown cloak she borrowed from Neisan and ran through the roads at full speed. She felt like shrinking at the “battlefield” that was approaching before her very own eyes. This battle was the epitome of the anger towards the saint. She honestly felt it was terrifying. What would happen to her if she were swallowed by that rage? Actually, she wanted to run away. She wanted to wait until everything was over in her own room, holding her knees.

But she didn't stop her running feet. She didn't think about trying to stop.

(Because I'm certain I don't want things to end like this.)

If the anti-saint faction were captured and executed then what exactly would be left behind after that? She knew. She knew to a horrible extent. In the end, nothing would remain- instead, only a new hatred would be born.

Yuna thought this while she ran as hard as she could.

She didn't want the numbers of people who were hurt to increase anymore. Surely everything could be severed here.

What gave Yuna's back a push were the days – a little less than a year – that she spent up to now as Celiastina. That night she walked into the royal palace for the first time, gazes of fear and hatred were directed to her. In those days, the royal palace was dark somewhere and enveloped in a suffocating atmosphere. And at some point, unnoticed,

that was undone and smiles returned to the people little by little. Yuna saw that. No matter how low someone was pushed down, no matter how much they thought they couldn't crawl up again, they should be able to pick a future where they could regain their smiles, as long as they didn't give up-.

(That's why I don't want to stand still.)

No matter who called her reckless, she couldn't give up.

"Hey, who is that. Someone stop them!"

A guard who questioned Yuna's running appearance shouted that out in a sharp voice. With that as a signal, the soldiers who were related to security turned their gazes to Yuna all at once. In this situation, where the servants had already been evacuated in general, even if she was covered by a cloak, Yuna's form was completely conspicuous. The soldiers assigned as security in the surrounding area must have thought Yuna was a messenger or something at first, but in the end they seemed to consider her appearance as being odd.

But she couldn't be caught here. She had to go to those who were fighting, wagering their lives. And then she had to convey all her thoughts as they were. Whether it was lip service or off the top of her head, she didn't care about that anymore. She only wanted to express her thoughts. Even if it was just the feelings of not giving up yet!

Her breaths hurt.

She ran so hard that it felt like her chest was going to collapse. Yuna, who was running, found the cloak to be a hindrance now and, knowing it would reveal her identity, she released her hand from the hem she was gripping in front of her chest. The cloak that flapped up vigorously by the wind revealed Yuna's appearance completely to the area.

The wind coiled around her skin.

The feet that struck the ground burned. Her clenched fists were sweating.

"That person is-"

One of the guards shouted.

"Lady Celiastina!"

That voice swept out surprisingly underneath the blue sky.

First, it was the soldiers on the edge of the group who noticed that voice and turned around. And then when they received the shock of the appearance of the girl that leapt into their eyes, they froze on the spot. Their discomposure immediately became a commotion and a chaos, apart from the battle, was invited to the area. Gradually, the very air in the field changed.

-The wind stopped suddenly.

The angry roars that were enough to shake the ground gradually became smaller and smaller. Soldiers loosened their grips on the swords they had raised and began to look for the person who summoned this strange chaos. Amongst these men, Yuna continued forward single-mindedly. Everyone's gazes naturally gathered on one point and the crowd of soldiers that seemed to surround Yuna began to shift. Eventually, everyone pulled back and a path was made in front of Yuna.

Yuna, while breathing with her entire body, proceeded even further.

And then-.

For the first time she confronted all those who were of the anti-saint faction.

They stood there for certain.

Shockingly, she caught sight of many people who ranged from old to young, and even women. Even though she could only see people who lived normal lives, they carried weapons, covered their bodies in unfamiliar combat uniforms, and were fighting with their lives even now.

There were many people who were injured and collapsed. The vivid red of blood burned into Yuna's eyes. A man who seemed to have already died was lying on the ground, limbs stretched out.

Is this what they called fighting?

But surely there had to be another way of fighting.

Yuna kneeled beside the man who had stopped breathing. In truth, this was the first time she saw a dead person. She braced her knees which felt like they were about to shake. His life ended here. But if it had still continued from here, she wondered what kind of future he had. Like Yuna herself, maybe the moment of realizing the wonderfulness of living would have come around even inside despair. But it was already too late.

“CElia!”

Among the people who were motionless, like they were caught in a spell, Siegcrest called out that name in a shout. He dashed over to Yuna, pushing his way through the crowd.

“You! What’re you doing here! You wanna die!?”

Her arm was grabbed hard and she was forced to stand. Yuna, who twisted her body and looked up with disagreement, caught sight of the people of the anti-saint faction who looked over here dumbfounded. But in their eyes anger started to dwell instead of surprise.

“Sieg, let me go!”

“What are you thinking, there’s no way I’d let you go. Hey, someone take Celia to her room.”

“NO! I won’t return like this. I don’t want to just wait around without doing anything, and I definitely can’t act like this is inevitable and reasonable!”

Yuna screamed that out desperately. Siegcrest’s fingers were digging into her arms, but strangely she couldn’t feel that. She had a feeling that if she lost her nerve, even the slightest bit, everything would be over.

“Please, everyone stop already. Don’t fight! I don’t want anyone to spill their blood any more than this!”

“Celia, calm down. It’s useless no matter how much you shout. We’re not in that situation anymore!”

She knew that. But she didn't want to know that. Yuna shook her head violently like a child.

A ray of light glimmered above her head.

The moment she realized that was a sharp blade, it was already after it swung down. If Siegcrest hadn't leapt back with Yuna's body right away then Yuna's head would have been completely split.

A large man, who seemed to be a person of the anti-saint faction, had swung that spear down. The man, who had a big physique and sense of intimidation that was no less than Siegcrest, slammed the butt of his spear into the ground with a thud and pierced Yuna with a gaze that was sharper than his spearhead.

“To think you'd appear here personally, Celiastina.”

This was said in a low voice that seemed to crawl on the ground.

“Did you regret your own actions and come to offer up your life?”

Could a person's rage be this visible? Yuna was horribly overwhelmed as she looked up at him, even forgetting her words. However, Siegcrest wasn't like that. He thrust Yuna behind him, pulled out his sword, and leapt at his opponent with great force, aiming for his breast. The large man caught that with the body of his spear and a shrill noise resounded, to the point where she thought she'd see sparks.

“STOP!”

Yuna screamed with a voice that was close to disappearing. Siegcrest and the large man, while glaring at each other, stopped their hands and froze for a brief period.

“Please, please just stop! There's no need to fight with swords because I'm right here! Right!?”

The true objective of the anti-saint faction should be Celiastina. It was because they thought they couldn't point a blade at the saint that they fought with the royal army instead. If that was the case, Yuna raised her voice frantically.

And, sure enough, the large man in front of her pulled back a little of his bloodthirst.

“Hmph.”

The man’s chilly gaze captured Yuna.

“Of course, that’s right. If you were thrust this sword into your chest and die on this spot, then we’ll throw away our weapons.”

He kicked a dagger that had rolled to his side to Yuna’s feet.

“Go on, do it.”

Yuna stared at the dagger for a while but raised her face and shook her head desperately.

“...I can’t do that.”

And then she stared firmly into the man’s rage-filled eyes.

“I can’t die yet. That is the only thing that’s not allowed. But the fact that I can’t die and everyone’s lives being put on the line are different problems! There must be another way. So, please, I beg of you, put away your blades!”

“Are you trying to say that, when we bet our lives here, we’re dying in vain?”

The man turned an even more severe expression at Yuna. If a voice could kill someone, then it would be a voice exactly like this. However, Yuna couldn’t withdraw. She stood up on trembling legs and, stepping on the ground firmly, she lifted her head once more.

“I didn’t say it was in vain. But I don’t think this is the best way either. Because I’ve seen it, constantly, in this past year. I’ve seen how people suffering similarly have found their own paths. I myself did the same. One year ago, I stood alone at the edge of despair. “Death” was my beginning.”

Celiastina’s death, and her own death. At the beginning she was just at a loss. Not knowing what she should do, she was only hurt by the surrounding gazes of hatred.

“But still, I managed to make it here recklessly and frantically. And then I knew. That, as long as you don’t lose the will to move forward, the road will certainly continue. I want everyone to understand that.”

“You simply don’t know what real despair is.”

“No, I don’t think so. A road will continue beyond any kind of despair– if one believes in it.”

Yuna answered that in an unwavering voice. It was certain truth she gained in this past year. Yuna looked over at the large man in front of her and the people of the anti-saint faction spread out behind him. Everyone continued to grip their weapons hard, not stepping back. However, she didn’t miss the faint hesitation in their eyes. It meant that Yuna’s voice wasn’t completely unreachable.

But it was still far. She hadn’t touched their hearts yet.

The large man’s eyes narrowed all of a sudden.

“What pretty words.”

Yuna’s eyes returned to him again at his cold voice.

“I am the one who has inherited the dying wishes of those who passed without even being granted the time to believe. And my fellow men behind me have the same thoughts. Like the dead who cannot wish for a future– we also do not wish for anything beyond this!”

The large man struck the ground hard again with his spear. That impact spread like a wave and the anti-saint faction regained their momentum. They lifted their weapons to the sky and raised their voices as if to encourage the large man.

“My name is Ghada. Once, I served as the captain of the third squad of the Order of Knights.”

Yuna was shocked and turned to look up at Siegcrest beside her. His profile, which had a sober expression, told her that those words were not lies.

“I had a brother who was younger than me by fifteen years. A younger brother who adored me and entered the Order of Knights the same as me. However, at that time, my brother made an inconsequential mistake that stopped your eyes, and he was imprisoned in that joke of a prison– the Holy Jail. I heard that my brother suffered horrible torture every day for a month. And then, when he died at last... the corpse that came back to us was such a terrible sight that it couldn’t be looked at directly.”

Ghada's voice shook with anger.

"You will never understand how much shock my parents received when they saw my brother's remains. Both of them passed away from the stress, as if following my younger brother. In just two years, this happened in succession... My brother and my parents. Do you know how great that regret is? Tell me, what path continues on for them. What exactly should they believe in! If you say you can preach the same lecture in front of those miserable remains, then try it!"

Yuna bit her lip, unable to refute him. Ghada's words were certainly correct. She didn't want to deny his feelings, or the feelings of those who came along with him. However-

Perhaps they gained strength from the sight of Yuna looking down, but the anti-saint faction leaned forward and started to blame her.

Give back my dad!

-Stop it.

Give back my son!

-Please, stop.

Give back my mom!

-I said stop.

Give back my husband!

-No, no!

These merciless shouts assaulted Yuna over and over and over again. She felt like she was about to go crazy.

It wasn't her, she wasn't the one who did it; that feeling happened to well up at this time. However, she threw it off immediately. If she was going to say something like it not being her fault, then from the start she wouldn't have stood in this spot. She knew that the problem wasn't there.

“Fel!”

Ghada inclined his head slightly and called out to a youth who stood, unassumingly, behind him. In that instant, there was complete silence in the area.

“You say it clearly too. What happened to your younger sister?”

The named youth hunched his shoulders, looking a little terrified. With such a timid expression, he stiffened while holding a spear to his chest.

“Fel, this will be our last moment. You must have thoughts you’ve kept at the bottom of your heart all this time!”

“...I... I...”

Finally, he opened his mouth with a shaking voice. His body tensed extremely when he met eyes with Yuna but he didn’t avert that gaze. He stared at Yuna, as if biting into her, and swallowed loudly.

“I... my sister... was a servant of the royal palace. She was born an ordinary commoner, but she had pretty gold hair and purple eyes... But you couldn’t stand that.”

While he was staring at her, tears gathered in his eyes. And, in contrast to his weak voice, a strength began to dwell in his eyes.

“Because my sister had the same colored hair and eyes as the saint when she was simply a servant, her hair was recklessly shaved and her eyes crushed. My sister committed suicide from that suffering. Why... why did she have to go through something like that? My sister was so happy when she entered the royal palace too; she smiled, saying she was blessed to be born with the same colored hair and eyes as the saint.”

Yuna couldn’t move.

This stabbed her chest more than being condemned by shouts. She couldn’t find anything like words to say to him. It’s true that Yuna didn’t know. The pain of a loved one being mercilessly hurt.

“Saint Celiastina, do you remember me.”

A hoarse voice rose up. The person who stepped forward from within the anti-saint faction group, as if he were pushing his way through the crowd, was a small old man. He glared up at Yuna- without both arms.

“From the looks of it, you do not remember anything. Is it that a human like me is similar to an insect to you.”

That's not true- but she couldn't even shake her head.

“Once, I used to be a craftsman who made hair ornaments. I even presented a piece to you. However, it seemed you weren't pleased with that work. You blamed my ornament for something such as causing misfortunes when you wore it, and so you sent soldiers to my workshop and destroyed all my works. When I saw my works smashed into pieces, it felt like even my soul was smashed. I protested immediately but the answer you gave me- was this.”

He shook his shoulders, displaying his flowing sleeves.

“It wasn't just these two arms that I lost! To me those two arms were the same as my life. There is no meaning to living anymore, but I came here with the single feeling of at least retaliating against you.”

And then he showed a self-mocking smile.

“You might laugh at what a senile old man who can't even point a sword can do, no? Certainly, the present me cannot hold a sword and cannot make hair ornaments. But, if I bite that throat with this mouth, I CAN STILL RIP YOUR THROAT!”

“—“

His spirit was terrifying. It felt even Yuna's beliefs would be overshadowed in front of that wrath.

“P-Please listen to my story as well!”

As if rushing to deliver a final blow, a young girl raised her voice immediately to the overwhelmed Yuna.

“I'm Lutti. My father worked to deliver vegetables and fruits to the royal palace. One time, it seemed there were rotten vegetables in the goods my father carried. You

happened to see that and, saying that you could not forgive rotten ingredients being brought to your mouth, you imprisoned my father. While in prison, the meals given to my father were all rotten vegetables. When my father was finally released he was horribly thin... and even now he can barely eat and is weakening day by day!"

Their heartrending voices became the trigger.

All the people of the anti-saint faction gathered on that spot started to open their mouths again, vying with one another.

What happened to themselves and what they were thinking right now. They leaned forward to convey this to Yuna with frank words. One person spoke, and then another person spoke.

Yuna could only continue to keep silent and listen to their voices. It was painful, it hurt, she wanted to run away from here. But she didn't want to lose to that thought. She wanted to accept their thoughts properly!

How much time passed like that, she wondered.

From the bottom of her heart, deep inside the very depths, a strange feeling began to permeate.

-This was a nostalgic feeling from somewhere.

The undulation of emotions that couldn't be controlled, and that weren't hers.

(Aah.)

It was an existence that she hadn't been able to feel for a very long time.

But, now, she was indeed feeling it.

(Celiastina.)

Yuna quietly pressed both hands to her chest.

(You're truly here, aren't you.)

She was suffering. She was sorrowful. She was at such a loss that she couldn't even think about shedding tears.

Yuna pressed the hands against her chest harder.

Ah, their voices were really reaching Celiastina right now.

Yuna could feel her thoughts to a painful degree.

Celiastina was regretful. She didn't want to hurt anyone any more. And, she also understood just how selfish of a wish that was.

(...Mm, I feel the same.)

She understood the thoughts of the anti-saint faction. And how they were trapped inside a suffering that was beyond imagination. However, even still, Yuna wanted them to give up on this idea. Right now, she thought this again.

No matter the words, it would surely sound like nothing but lip service to them. No, it actually was that. It might be inevitable for her words to be tossed away as the idealistic thoughts of a naive little girl who didn't know what true despair was. But Yuna had desperately gone forward to this point, holding up these pretty words and aiming for it. In doing so, she experienced with this body that there was an open road. And, it was because Celiastina felt that too.

(Please, don't give up on everything.)

Yes, she strongly wished that.

But that didn't become words. It couldn't become words. As long as their eyes were stained with hatred, no words would reach their hearts.

The anti-saint faction's momentum was about to reach its peak.

Everyone brought up their own suffering and tried to take a step towards Yuna. In response, the royal army also readied themselves to counterattack immediately if the anti-saint faction moved again. The free-for-all fight, that had quietened temporarily by Yuna jumping in, became a difficult situation which could not be stopped any

longer.

“What’s wrong, did you run out of words already?”

Ghada asked Yuna with a voice that carried well even through the tumult.

Even though it was the anti-saint faction who would have no future if they fought once again, they didn’t show any hesitation at all. The same went for this man in front of her. They didn’t forget that they were in a disadvantageous position, they knew full well, nevertheless they didn’t care.

“Please.”

-stop.

But Ghada did not draw back. Knowing that a number of soldiers had blades directed at him, he pointed his spearhead at Yuna again.

“At last, everything will end with this. It’s finally over!”

Ghada tightened his grip on his spear to stab it out. In that instant, a thick arm stretched out to protect Yuna. It was Siegcrest. And, as if to take over for Siegcrest who was committed to protection, the surrounding soldiers showed movements to bring down Ghada.

(STOP-!!)

“Wait now.”

At that time, a calm voice that was incongruous to the area broke in.

The soldiers stopped moving as if they were frozen. The tips of their swords gleamed sharply at Ghada’s chest.

Yuna slowly turned around.

This was a familiar voice. The tension left her body, and she almost collapsed to her knees on the ground.

“It is not over yet. That girl cannot accept everyone’s hatred. The reasoning being that girl is not Celiastina.”

There stood King Ron.

# Chapter Eleven

The anti-saint faction would soon arrive at the royal palace; Asyut, who received that report, was already heading towards the main gates in a formation along with the commander of the Order of Holy Knights, Vansaider, who was leading the army and the others.

At last the time has come, and Asyut pressed his lips tightly together.

Thus far, everything was moving within their range of expectations. The numbers of the anti-saint faction, their equipment, and their combat strength too, it was the same as the information they obtained beforehand. After all, it was only a small uprising by the common people. No matter how they struggled, they would not even be able to get a blow at the royal palace. However, the fact that they were literally “risking their lives” bore hard on Asyut’s heart. It must be the same for the soldiers who were about to clash swords from this time on.

“Them, hm.”

Vansaider muttered that in a voice without emotion as he stared at the group that appeared beyond the opened gates. Asyut, who stood beside him, felt cheerless upon actually seeing the appearance of the anti-saint faction right in front of him. –Although they had equipment, weren’t they just exceedingly ordinary people.

(Must we point our blades at them?)

Of course, he did not reveal his unrest though.

The rebel army, consisting of less than a hundred people, stopped in front of the main gates. No one opened their mouths. Everyone only glared over at them with burning eyes.

“Who is the leader?”

When Vansaider asked that, a large man that stood at the head of the group stepped out.

“Me.”

Asyut recognized that figure. He was a man called Ghada and, originally, was in a position of managing one of the units of the royal army. Although information about how he was leading the anti-saint faction was known beforehand, the sight of having to oppose a former comrade was still shocking.

“We demand for you to hand over Saint Celiastina, and we have no intentions of conceding on any other suggestions.”

He declared that clearly. But, of course, Vansaider did not waver.

“We cannot accept such a demand. Abandon your weapons and surrender. Or you’ll be spilling blood in vain.”

“There is only one thing we desire! Hand over Saint Celiastina!”

Ghada raised his voice even more. And then, as if identifying with him, his comrades followed after with shouts. Give us Celiastina, bring out Celiastina!

-In the end it was hopeless, huh.

It was at the same time that Asyut decided this that Vansaider raised his right hand, giving a signal to the waiting soldiers.

“Capture them.”

The dialogue between the two, which couldn’t even be called a dialogue, ruptured in an instant.

In that moment, the area was enveloped in a great noise. No one from the anti-saint faction let go of their weapons; far from that, they lifted those weapons and actively dove at the royal army. Not having the slightest fear of death, that spirit drove them on towards a battle that held no salvation for them.

(...They haven’t the slightest fear of death, huh.)

It was a sight of the anti-saint faction raising their swords with desperate expressions.

They fought according to their own beliefs. Even though all that awaited them was

only “death”, that satisfaction was what they believed in.

Asyut burned the sight before his eyes into his mind firmly.

(Is this truly the right way.)

The answer to that was obscure but it was certainly in his heart. If Celiastina was asked the same question, the answer “that makes no sense” would be returned without a moment’s hesitation. And then she would surely act. In order to move on the path she believed was right, she would rush out regardless of appearance. That was the kind of person she was.

Yes, that’s exactly why.

The instant the atmosphere of the area changed and he noticed the appearance of Celiastina at that center, Asyut closed his eyes and felt relieved somewhere in his heart.

Celiastina, who jumped into the battlefield with a frantic expression and nothing but herself. Other than being a saint, she was a normal girl with no powers in particular. And yet, she was always confronting people with everything that she had. And, before he knew it, he had expectations for her because of that.

Celiastina stood resolutely on the spot.

It was Asyut himself who proposed locking her in her own room; it was a proposal he made because he thought it was impossible for her to stay silent and watch the anti-saint faction’s uprising. Locking her in from the outside was a somewhat rough way, but it was because he thought he couldn’t stop her if he didn’t do that.

Asyut wondered if Linus decided to overlook her, but he immediately negated that thought. Linus also agreed to contain Celiastina in her room and, though he was a man who couldn’t be read, he had never once done anything that would expose her to danger. Under these circumstances, it was unlikely to think he let her out of the room.

(Then who.)

Instantly, various faces came to mind. Amongst them, there was only one person who caught on Asyut’s mind.

(-King Ronbarno.)

None other than the man who purposefully summoned Celiastina and breathed out information about the anti-saint faction. Because he also said things such as having hopes for Celiastina's actions, it was consistent if Asyut thought the result of that was this.

(King Ronbarno, what exactly do you want her to do?)

He asked that to a man who was not here. Everything was moving according to that man's will- and yet, what more was he looking for at this last moment.

"Let us secure Lady Celiastina immediately."

One of the captains beside Asyut suggested this. However Vansaider, who was also right beside Asyut and watching these proceedings, raised a hand to check him.

"Wait."

"Hah?"

"This place is a critical moment for her as well. We should not move."

"B-But."

Looking unconvinced, the captain sent an imploring gaze at Asyut. A caution that leaving things like this would put Celiastina in danger flickered in that man's eyes. Asyut knew, but he also didn't feel like stopping her.

"As the commander said, let us watch over the situation for the moment."

At Asyut's response, the captain shook his head like he couldn't believe it. On the other hand, Vansaider, who had been staring ahead, looked over at Asyut for the first time.

"However, Asyut, you are not in a position to merely watch over this situation, no? - There must be something you are concerned about."

Asyut lightly bit his lip at Vansaider's words. As the commander of the Order of Holy Knights, he was acquainted with Asyut since Asyut was a child. For Vansaider, who had a long relationship with Asyut that exceeded work, Asyut's worries and uneasiness

seemed to leak out. Asyut gave a single nod and threw his gaze once again at the people of the anti-saint faction. As he roughly glanced over them, it was apparent as to what Vansaider was saying.

“Your younger sister isn’t there.”

Yes, no matter how hard he stared to confirm this, the sight of his younger sister, Milifaire, was nowhere to be seen.

He had wondered the moment he saw the anti-saint faction. Where in the world was his sister. This should be the last uprising. And that’s why there was no doubt she would surely be in this place- is what he thought.

“Try thinking about the meaning behind her absence.”

Urged by Vansaider, Asyut closed his eyes for a few moments and cut off his awareness from the tumult of this place.

(.....)

Sharpening his senses, he began to mull over the matter.

Milifaire was not participating in the attack, so did she withdraw from the anti-saint faction?... No, in the information they obtained from the king just before this, there was no talk about that. Milifaire was unmistakably participating in the anti-saint faction, and should have been expected to join this assault as well.

Then did a situation suddenly occur where she couldn’t join? Such as being stopped by someone, or getting involved in something before she came here- some circumstance like that.

But, if there were such circumstances, the fact that her comrades of the anti-saint faction currently in front of him were this calm felt out of place. Her existence should be a large key to them. The one and only blood relative of Asyut, who was the First Holy Knight. It would be quite attractive to use her as a bargaining material. That being the case, on top of her appearance not being seen now, the behavior of the anti-saint faction, as if she hadn’t been in the organization to begin with, made him feel a faint catch.

(Is Milifaire acting separately?)

Suddenly, that assumption came to mind.

Acting separately. If that was the case, then what for.

What meaning was there in having a powerless girl act separately.

(I have a bad feeling.)

Asyut felt something cold run down his back.

Milifaire, as his younger sister, was a member of one of the prominent noble families in this country. In the past she lived inside the royal palace and naturally knew all about the western side, but also the northern side where only those with status could enter.

-Knew all about.

(It can't be.)

Asyut looked back at the royal palace.

“Commander.”

He called out to Vansaider beside him.

“I’m leaving this place to you. Please ensure nothing serious befalls Lady Celiastina.”

He only said that shortly and, upon seeing Vansaider nod, Asyut ran from that place like the wind. He went in the complete opposite direction of the center of conflict, towards the royal palace.

In preparation for the anti-saint faction’s assault this time, a strict guard system was laid throughout the royal palace. A sufficient number of guards were arranged at all gates, and they paid firm attention to not allow anyone from the outside to enter. For example, even if the raid group at the main gates were a decoy for another group to attempt an invasion from the shadows, it would almost be impossible.

(Almost, being the problem here.)

It was troubling but Asyut happened to know something which made him unable to

declare that it was “absolutely” impossible. There was only one place, an “entrance”, where soldiers were not arranged.

Asyut cut across the plaza, plunged into the building, and ran even more. He rushed up the stairs, skipping steps, dashed through the corridor, and then ran down another set of stairs while skipping steps. It was extremely quiet inside the royal palace, which had almost no signs of life. Only his own breathing echoed right beside his ears.

He came out into a large corridor. There was also just a few people here. If he continued through this corridor and entered a narrow hallway, the end of that lead to the residential district of the royal family and noble families.

And, if his prediction was correct...

Asyut thought while he was out of breath. It may have been correct for Celiastina to slip out of her room. Because, under these circumstances, it couldn’t be said that her personal rooms were absolutely safe.

And then Asyut gradually slowed his feet. There was no one around anymore, only a long corridor that was deathly silent. There were sculptures of goddesses placed at equal intervals on both sides of the corridor. When he approached one of them, he pushed it to the side without hesitation.

If one paid attention to how much strength was used, the statue moved with a feeling that was much lighter than it looked. In the square of the brand new floor that hadn’t been exposed for many years, a notch entered his eyes that he wouldn’t have seen if he didn’t strain his eyes for a long time. The complicated patterns of the floor were meant to deceive, but there was a small knob there. When Asyut put his finger on the knob, a hidden door opened.

A staircase, where only a single person could pass through, appeared. A lamp was prepared on the stairs a few steps ahead but there was no need to touch it and Asyut proceeded cautiously in the dark.

This hidden passage was an emergency escape passage, exclusively for royalty and influential nobles.

In order for only a limited amount of people to be aware of this passage, naturally guards were not arranged here in this assault.

However, Milifaire knew about this passage. At a certain age, royals and some noble families were informed about the existence of this passage. As far as Asyut could remember, a situation where it was actually used had never fallen. That's why it was mostly forgotten, but perhaps- he came here driven by that thought.

When he stepped off the stairs, next was a straight path that continued. Asyut carefully confirmed his surroundings while he caught his breath. -In the cool air, there was no smell of smoke. If a person had passed through this passage earlier, they would have surely carried a lamp to light the dark path. That there was no lingering scent meant that no one had passed through here for a while.

(Did I overthink it.)

It was just at that moment when he released a sigh of relief.

A fleeting glimpse of light was seen up ahead.

It was so faint that he thought it was his imagination, but it wavered slightly in the distance without disappearing. Asyut straightened his back again and gazed steadily at that light. He held his breath and concentrated all his senses while watching over it. In the meantime, the light steadily came closer and closer. There were two lights. There was no doubt any longer, someone came to the royal palace secretly using the hidden passage.

His heart was leaping greatly to the point of being noisy. Who was it that was carrying the lamp.

(Who-)

Even though he should know the answer, Asyut could not imagine it clearly in his mind. The feeling that he still couldn't believe it, even after coming to this point, fogged his mind.

But, at last, the moment came.

The person who carried the lamp noticed Asyut's presence and stopped their feet. For a while, there was not the slightest movement like that, but eventually as if they had resolved themselves the footsteps once again came towards him.

Two indistinct human shapes rose out of the darkness. And it was impossible not to

recognize one of them.

They were a person who had been separated from him many years ago.

“-Milifaire.”

Asyut murmured that without any strength.

That figure, several sizes smaller than him, stood in front of Asyut without a sound. Behind her, a young muscular man also stopped.

“...Brother”

The small shape- Milifaire, responded as if making sure.

A distant memory was revived once again.

His young sister who always followed behind him, giving her utmost trust to him. On that day, in that room where Celiastina summoned them, she shook with nothing but uneasiness. The instant Celiastina told him to choose only one person, Milifaire's expression froze with terror. He had never been able to forget that but-.

Asyut stared hard again at his sister, who stood in front of him today.

The long glossy black hair was now casually cut short. In the uniform of a squire that must have been prepared from somewhere, she looked like a young man at a glance. It was as if her face was entirely without her former delicacy and sweetness, and those unwavering eyes were those of a fighter.

“.....”

Neither of them voiced anything, they simply stood still on the spot.

Asyut came here precisely because he thought she might use the hidden passage. However, now that he was actually confronting her like this, he lost any and every one of his words to the shock that seemed to strike his head. And Milifaire appeared to be the same in front of him.

There was a heavy silence.

“Mille, so this man is your brother, Lord Asyut, huh.”

The man who held back behind Milifaire raised his voice. Mille, that must be Milifaire. Asyut felt a faint irritation at the man who called her by a nickname as if it were natural.

“That’s right, Jin.”

Milifaire murmured that in a voice that was suppressing her emotions.

“I never thought we’d be discovered before we arrived inside the royal palace. In fact, I wasn’t planning on stopping even once until I went to Celiastina’s personal room and killed her with these hands.”

“.....”

“Brother, you won’t overlook us, will you?”

Milifaire passed the lamp to her left hand and, without the appearance of hesitation, reached for the dagger fastened to her waist with her right hand. The man behind her, Jin, similarly placed his hand on his sword. However, Asyut was the only one who did not do that. Keeping both his hands down, he stared intently into Milifaire’s black eyes.

“–Yeah, I can’t overlook you two.”

Finally, he only muttered that.

“Then we’ll go through you even if we have to use force.”

“Milifaire, give up already.”

Now wasn’t the time to be stricken with emotion. Asyut told himself that and desperately gathered his reason. If he lost his focus it felt like he would become dazed at the reality in front of him. However, at this opportunity to face his sister which finally came around, he couldn’t just stand still and let her pass.

“I want you to give up and surrender. Even if you break into the royal palace, Lady Celiastina is not in her room. And the others who are assaulting the main gates have also been suppressed by this time.”

“I’m different from you, brother.”

Milifaire did not seem to be fazed, and glared back firmly at Asyut.

“Unlike you, brother, I’m not a person who resigns themselves to their lot. Sorry, but I also have no sympathy. On that day, since the moment you “saved” me at the expense of all the others, I’ve lived just to get revenge on Celiastina. Whether I kill that woman with these hands, or whether I die— there is nothing but that.”

“.....”

Pierced by those strong eyes, Asyut’s words were stuck.

“...It’s exactly as you’ve said.”

Asyut clenched his fist.

“I’m a weak person. Up to now, I’ve given up on a lot of things. But I don’t think that all the choices I’ve made to this point were mistakes. And I believe, saving you on that day too, was the right choice.”

“That is nothing more than self-satisfaction, brother. To me it was a hellish choice!”

Milifaire’s voice was ragged and when her own voice echoed through the passage she seemed to return to herself.

“Anyway, I didn’t come here to talk with you, brother. If you are thinking of me, even the slightest bit, then I’m asking you to be silent and let us pass.”

“Milifaire.”

Asyut called out that name once more, this time with force.

“From that day on, we’ve reached this day without being able to talk properly even once. Honestly speaking, I’ve been afraid to face you when you’ve become a member of the anti-saint faction. But I don’t want to avert my eyes from you anymore. And it’s because we’re here now that I wish to talk to you properly.”

“.....”

“Don’t listen, Mille. This man is already our enemy.”

Jin whispered sharply from behind. Milifaire’s shoulders shook slightly.

“Isn’t that the case?”

“Shut up.”

Milifaire spat that out in strong tone.

“I know, that this person is our enemy. That’s right, this person who has always stayed by Celiastina’s side, despite being completely hurt, and who hasn’t done anything. Far from that, he’s about to marry that woman soon. Abandoning his conscience, he’s been reduced to a man who should be looked down on for just chasing power!”

“THAT’S WRONG!”

Asyut, not to be outdone, raised his voice.

“I didn’t choose to remain in the royal palace in order to gain power. There is no doubt I hated Lady Celiastina, and there were countless times I thought about wanting to leave the royal palace and live somewhere far away. I also thought about ending my own life and being released from all this pain. I felt the same things as you, Milifaire.”

“How dare you say it’s the same!”

“That’s why I fully understand your feelings of trying to get revenge by becoming a member of the anti-saint faction. I might have become one too- were I not the First Holy Knight.”

Yes, that was a large problem for Asyut. As he spoke, Asyut firmly confronted his own feelings once again. If that duty hadn’t been given to him, he wouldn’t have been standing in this place right now. That might be what Milifaire called an insistence on power. However, she was wrong, it wasn’t like that.

“Before I am the man called Asyut Rothenlukia, I am this country’s First Holy Knight. And I think the First Holy Knight is an existence which holds a heavy significance. No matter the injuries I bear personally, the “First Holy Knight” must hold their head high and stand tall. If the saint cannot become the people’s hope then, at the very least, I thought I could and that is how I’ve passed the days until today.”

“I can’t understand!”

“Yeah, and I didn’t think about having you understand. I’m certain there are many who think I’m foolish for killing myself as an individual to serve the country. That’s why you don’t have to understand- I only wish for you to know my thoughts.”

“And?”

Milifaire narrowed her eyes with hatred.

“Are you wanting to say that even marrying that Celiastina, if it’s an important duty, you would be willing?”

For a second Asyut was pressed into silence. However, he soon continued his words in a voice with no hesitation.

“...After you left the royal palace, so many things happened. The situation has changed greatly from that time. And you could say Celiastina is one of the most extreme changes. Though you would not understand right now.”

“What do you mean by that. Are you saying I’m already an outsider?”

“That’s correct, at least right now. That’s why I want you to know. Don’t throw away your life here, and get to know what has happened until now. And I want you to watch the things in the future as well.”

“It’s useless to try and placate me like that! We ourselves know best that there’s no future for the anti-saint faction. That’s why we’ll stick to our beliefs to the end.”

“You don’t know yet whether there’s a future or not. No, I’ll be sure to do something about it. I’ve decided that.”

In that moment Celiastina appeared in the middle of the battle with the anti-saint faction.

He didn’t want to give up any more things any longer. Like what she’d been doing this past year- he wasn’t going to hesitate to move forward on the path he believed in.

“Don’t listen to him, Mille.”

Jin moved forward, as if to push aside Milifaire. He pulled out his sword from its sheathe in a smooth motion and pointed it at Asyut like that.

“The objective you came here for isn’t your “brother” but “Celiastina”. There’s no time to stop here. Mille, take out your blade too.”

“...kgh.”

Even Asyut’s eyes could see Milifaire tighten her right hand which remained gripping the handle of her dagger. And the slight hesitation that made her hand movement slow for an instant.

However, Asyut’s words could not completely silence her will.

Milifaire bit her lip hard and then yanked her blade out of its sheathe all at once. The blade of the dagger was illuminated dimly by the lamp’s light.

Asyut realized that if he drew his own blade then he would not be able to turn back. But, while that may be true, he couldn’t just show these two into the royal palace before his own eyes.

What exactly should he do.

A silence was brought about by Asyut’s indecision, but a quiet sound heard from behind him immediately broke that.

The sound of a lamp being picked up and fire being struck. Following that, the sound of footsteps descending the stairs slowly.

(Shit.)

Someone had noticed this passage. Asyut unconsciously made to let Milifaire get away. However, soon the figure who showed up was an unthinkable person and Asyut’s mind went blank.

“–King Ronbarno!”

As that name was shouted, Asyut stood dumbfounded on the spot. Milifaire and Jin, who were right beside him, also became speechless with an expression of disbelief.

Wasn't this some kind of mistake? Asyut doubted his own eyes, but that man was undoubtedly King Ronbarno Sibelius. Not minding the hem of his clothes becoming covered in dust, he stepped off the last step of the staircase with a relaxed footstep. And then, upon recognizing Asyut and Milifaire's forms, the corners of his eyes crinkled slightly. Behind him followed two people, Neisan and Aeneas.

"I apologize but I heard your conversation."

The king began to talk in a tone that lacked any tension. There was no tension but it was filled to the brim with a pressure that brooked no disagreement.

"I intend to understand your thoughts truly. Each and every person is supported by their beliefs and trying to walk on the path they believe in, aren't they... However, I have taken it upon myself to obstruct that."

"King Ronbarno, I..."

Milifaire opened her mouth but the king shook his head and interrupted that.

"I do not meant to criticize you here and now. I came to tell you- one truth."

"One... truth...?"

"Correct. You and the anti-saint faction, even if you were to defeat all the soldiers, you can never reach Saint Celiastina... I came here in order to tell you the reason for that."

Milifaire's eyebrows drew together.

"Never reach, what do you mean..."

"Come. To where "she" is."

The king only said that and then turned around. But the one who couldn't keep silent was Jin, who came here along with Milifaire. He raised his drawn blade firmly in front of him and spoke in a firm voice.

"We can't do that. If we follow you like this, we'll just reach the prisons anyway. To us, you share the sin of leaving Celiastina at large, and if you're going to get in the way then I won't hesitate even if you're the king!"

But before he took a step, Neisan and Aeneas stood in his way without saying anything. Their hands rested on the handle of their swords, and their eyes told of how they would cut Jin down without hesitation if he were to move any further.

“I believe you do not just want to rage about wildly. If there is still an unknown truth then do you not wish to know it? More so if it relates to Saint Celiastina.”

The king only sent a glance at Jin and then began to climb the stairs in the dark.

“...Let's go, Jin.”

Milifaire was glaring at that back, but she said that in a quiet voice while she returned her dagger to its sheath.

“In any case, if we're here already, I'd like to know the unknown truth if there is still one.”

“–But.”

“The situation had changed greatly from that time. Celiastina being one of the most extreme– isn't that so, brother?”

That cold voice was tossed at him and Asyut, who stood still in that spot, turned to face his sister again.

“–That's right.”

Asyut gave a clear nod. However, a feeling similar to terror swirled in his chest. Where was the king going? And what exactly was he trying to say? In truth, he already knew. He knew but he also wanted it to be in precise words. And that was soon to be granted. However–.

His feet on the stairs were heavy. But he couldn't do something like turn back. Asyut looked up at the back of the king who was climbing the steps and narrowed his eyes slightly.

# Chapter Twelve

They headed to the main gates of the royal palace.

At the front was the king, following him was Asyut, Milifaire, and then Jin. At the end was Neisan and Aeneas. During their walk through the corridor empty of people, no one opened their mouth.

The cold air in the corridor accelerated the tension in the area. Currently, the main gates were in the middle of a battle. How did the situation go when Celiastina appeared on the battlefield? Asyut thought over this matter as he moved out of the building with nervous legs. Was she safe or was the battle already reaching its conclusion? However, the tumult of that place couldn't reach this place. And that just made Asyut feel even more stifled.

When they exited the building, angry voices that were thrown past each other flew into Asyut's ears.

He knew immediately that the battle wasn't over yet.

Far from that, it even seemed like the anti-saint faction was becoming increasingly animated.

(And Lady Celiastina?)

Panic pushed on Asyut's back. He was driven by the impulse to push aside the king, who wasn't breaking his relaxed stride, and rush over to the main gate in an instant.

"What the heck is that."

Jin muttered this in a puzzled voice when he looked at the center of that chaos.

"It can't be... Celiastina in the battlefield?"

"That is correct– is how I will answer for the moment."

The king answered without turning around.

“But that’s impossible.”

“That is not the case. If it’s “her” then she would not hesitate to do it. This is “her” personal intention.”

““Her”...”

Milifaire, who was walking half a step behind Asyut, whispered this quietly. It seemed that she had begun to feel strange at the king’s words. Who exactly was this “her” that he was indicating to–.

The king’s gait did not change.

The eyes of the guards popped wide open as they let the calmly walking king pass. They probably didn’t know what was happening today. No matter how small its scale, the king was somehow proceeding to a battlefield. Properly speaking, he wasn’t a person that was supposed to exist in this place– the same as Celiastina who appeared a while ago.

That Celiastina stood, unchanged, in the center of this mass.

Right now, he couldn’t see anything but her delicate back. It appeared like she was exchanging words in a strong tone with the leader, Ghada. No, perhaps it would be more correct to say she was being showered one-sidedly by words.

After Asyut left this place once, Celiastina had stood in the center of this battlefield facing that large man as her opponent with a straight back until this moment. Was that how prepared she was to receive herself the condemnations of the people who hated her?

As Asyut stared at her back he felt as if his heart were being squeezed and he had an urge to cry. He wanted to protect that small body behind his back and face these difficulties in her place. But even though he thought like this, she would never stop walking. Like a person trapped in a cage who, before they knew it, broke out and wanted to flap their wings.

(But there are limits.)

This situation was too much for her hands alone. The problem was much too large and nothing could be done with Celiastina’s singular determination.

Ghada brandishing his spear in front of Celiastina entered Asyut's eyes. For an instant he was frightened, but Ghada's actions were anticipated by the soldiers around him. Immediately they readied themselves for a counterattack. Ghada was going to be killed like that.

Were it not for the king raising his voice.

“Wait now.”

It was a quiet voice as usual. However, it resounded impressively on the battlefield.

The well-trained soldiers came to a complete stop with the tips of their swords pointed at Ghada, right before they tore his skin. Celiastina, who turned around, showed a shocked expression when she recognized the figure of the king— and then, as if her strength left her, her legs shook.

“It is not over yet.”

The king looked out over the people of the anti-saint faction.

“That girl cannot accept everyone’s hatred. The reasoning being that girl is not Celiastina.”

“Kin... King Ronbarno...!”

Even Ghada, who had just been about to be pierced, opened his eyes wide and muttered only that. The anti-saint faction members who followed behind him also fell deadly quiet. Even the sound of someone swallowing seemed to echo.

“What do you mean by this girl isn’t Celiastina!”

Jin, who had followed them up to here, raised his voice in a snarl.

“No matter how you look at her, isn’t she Celiastina herself. As if I could forget this appearance!”

People stood there in surprise and then, all at once, their eyes concentrated on Celiastina. That Celiastina only stared at the king intently with unreadable eyes.

“It means exactly how it sounds. Indeed, her appearance is Celiastina’s no matter

where you look. However, she is not the person herself. Because the real Celiastina has already ended her own life.”

“–What are you saying...”

Everyone in the area was enveloped in shock. It was the same for Asyut who received the king’s words from right behind him. However, there was something that flashed in his mind immediately. The moment Celiastina was no longer Celiastina. The moment she lost her life. That was surely...

“It was about a year ago. Celiastina left the royal palace without notice and disappeared into the depths of the forest. After a frantic search, she was found in a valley. –The one who found her was you, Asyut, correct?”

“...Yes.”

Asyut was addressed suddenly, but somehow he managed to keep calm and nod.

“It is likely Celiastina threw herself into the valley. The moment Asyut pulled her up, already she was no longer the girl from before.”

Celiastina – or the girl who was thought of as Celiastina – was wrapped up in a cold air. Her surroundings began to take a fearful distance from her.

“The Celiastina here now is not the real Celiastina. This girl is an entirely different person. An existence who appeared to fill the absence of a saint. Therefore, it was not her who murdered innocent people and she was not the one to give you your sufferings. The creation of the Holy Jail and the torture inflicted there- any one of the sins committed by Saint Celiastina cannot be attributed to this girl.”

“.....”

“Taking revenge on this current Celiastina cannot become what you all in the anti-saint faction truly desire.”

In response to the king’s words, Asyut once again turned his face to Celiastina. However, she did not move at all.

“There’s no way I can believe such an absurd story...!”

Whereas Jin rejected the king's words with a trembling voice.

"It's impossible, that kind of thing. It's obviously a lie to silence us."

"It is inevitable for you to think that. However, it is the truth."

"King Ronbarno."

Another voice rose up. It was Ghada who had pointed a spear at Celiastina moments ago. He was in a situation where he was surrounded by soldiers with their weapons drawn still, but he showed no fear and faced the king.

"Then, who the hell is this girl. Even if she's a double, she's too similar."

"Well now, even I do not know the real thing."

"I'll ask you to stop confusing us. If that story just now is the truth then you prepared this girl."

"Oh no."

The king denied Ghada's words shortly.

"I made no such preparations. That is why, in this long period, I have been at a loss as to how to treat her existence. She is truly a mysterious girl. I have always thought it strange how, even though this should be another person's affairs, she is able to proceed straight forward even to this point. She herself should have nothing special like powers. However, hope goes on after in the places she's walked. I can say this because we are here now but- I think she is a rare being. Regrettably, she is, in the end, nothing more than a "substitute". She cannot replace the real Celiastina. And it will not be long before she disappears."

"....."

Ghada closed his mouth and sent a shaky gaze at Celiastina. He, no, the majority of the people here could not understand what the king said.

However, only Asyut was unlike them.

He understood the king's words to a painful degree.

-When she disappears. When she greets “the last moment”.

It was a future Asyut did not want to think about. One he kept turning his eyes away from, despite being stricken by that premonition countless of times. However, this despairing belief which didn’t permit that any longer fell quietly on Asyut’s back.

“Celiastina ended her own life. But it seems her soul has not been extinguished. She will return soon. And, from there, that will be the true moment of truth. –For herself, and for us as well.”

For the first time, the king’s eyes showed a strong light. He looked out over everyone in this place once again.

“It is not that “time” yet. The moment worthy of you all risking your lives is not this moment. I would like you all to understand that somehow.”

“.....”

There is no one who opened their mouth. It was the intensity of the king, which allowed no denial, that overwhelmed the surroundings rather than the details that were revealed though.

“...If.”

Amongst this, the one who raised a thin voice was Milifaire, Asyut’s younger sister. She had been watching over the proceedings quietly and now she was not looking at the king. Her gaze was concentrated directly on Celiastina.

“If what the king said is the truth. Then I want to hear your own words. Who exactly are you? And what are you standing here for?”

Everyone’s attention gathered on Celiastina once again. The said Celiastina glanced at Milifaire and then lowered her eyes slightly.

“I...”

Her mouth barely moved. It was a quiet voice but it had not lost its strength.

That voice, which he should have long grown used to hearing, seemed to be very far from Asyut.

“What and who I am, I don’t think that’s important right now in this place. It’s true I am not the Celiastina of before... but I’m not the past me either. Right now, I’m existing as neither of them. Only, in this past year, I’ve just been walking down the path I believe in as best I can. And, here in this moment, I am confident there is something beyond that road. That’s why I don’t want to give up. On everyone, and on Celiastina.”

She raised her head and declared this in a clear voice.

“I’m certain that Celiastina will be able to change in the future. There, she will face her own sins. But maybe she might step off the path again. There might be a time where she can’t see her surroundings and finds herself at a loss. If such a time comes again, I would like you all to stop her at that time.”

That’s why, she added as she looked over all the gathered people.

“Everyone, please watch over Celiastina. And please give your words to her again like today. So that she won’t forget her crimes up to now, and so that she’ll never again mistake her path. The me right now can’t accept everyone’s thoughts and feelings. – Just like the king said.”

Please, I ask this of everyone. Saying that, she bowed her head deeply to her knees. Her long golden hair slid down over a delicate shoulder like a stream.

“...That’s impossible.”

Milifaire muttered that haltingly. At some point, a dagger was gripped in her right hand.

“I can’t do such a thing at this point in time. Because I’ve survived to this day for the sake of getting revenge on Celiastina. Yes, that’s right. It doesn’t matter anymore whether you’re the real one or the fake one.”

It was a terribly even voice. Her expression showed that her mind was not there, but her next actions were quick. Among the people who were standing still, Milifaire sprung off the ground and raised her right hand. Right before the lunging sharp blade tore Celiastina’s chest- Asyut stood in front of it.

Asyut nimbly grabbed Milifaire’s wrist and twisted it diagonally like that; Milifaire gave a muffled scream and grimaced. The blade spilled from her hand and struck the ground with an echoing clatter. Milifaire glared at Asyut with a pained expression.

“Is this your answer, brother?”

“...It is.”

“Weren’t you the one who said the both of us tasted the same suffering, brother. And yet, why can’t we come to the same answer?”

“You left the royal palace and I remained in the royal palace. I’m sure that was when the path we followed changed.”

“WHY!”

Milifaire’s voice was close to a scream.

“Why do you talk like that, like you understand everything! Isn’t that acting like I don’t understand anything! Well, then it can’t be helped. I don’t know anything but hate. I could only keep myself up with hatred. And yet, why aren’t you like that, brother. You should have the same hatred. I can’t. I can’t anymore. Everything hung on this day. It’s impossible to be given another path at this point now!”

And then Milifaire collapsed on the spot. Her wailing voice was soon soaked with tears.

Asyut looked down at his sister hanging her head and softly kneeled by her side. He gripped her trembling hand, which seemed forlorn without its dagger, tightly. It was a rough and cracked hand, not one in Asyut’s memory.

“Milifaire.”

No matter what the words were, he was sure they would be meaningless to Milifaire. Right now, Asyut didn’t think his thoughts would reach her.

“Milifaire.”

And so, Asyut only called out her name.

Inside Asyut’s hand, Milifaire clenched hers into a fist. Unable to bear the thought of how small her hand was, Asyut embraced her strongly, as if burying her in his arms.

“Milifaire. It’s enough. It’s enough already.”

Was it Milifaire who clung to Asyut. Or Asyut who clung to Milifaire.

Their hearts were still far apart, but Asyut felt the warmth of their certain blood connection.

“Let’s leave it at this point, you guys.”

During this, Siegcrest raised his voice for the first time in a while.

“The anger of you anti-saint faction guys isn’t small enough to be forgotten after kicking up a fuss here, right... Ghada, you too.”

Facing the man who stood right beside Celiastina, Siegcrest gestured at the spear in his hands with his chin.

“What do you want to do. Is it that you won’t feel satisfied until you stab Celiastina once with that spear?”

“...Even then it wouldn’t be enough. Something like one thrust would never be enough.”

Siegcrest threw a fearless smile at Ghada’s low answer.

“I guess not. But this small body would easily die with one of your thrusts. And then it’d be over. It’d all end, if you swung that spear that is.”

“.....”

“Throw away your weapons already. That kind of thing is too weak to throw your thoughts at Celiastina. There’s another way. Am I wrong?”

Ghada did not open his mouth. The people lined up behind him were also completely silent, and only Milifaire’s sobbing echoed in the public square.

“King Ronbarno, please. If everyone in the anti-saint faction throws away their weapons and surrenders, please spare their lives...!”

The king returned a faint smile to Celiastina’s entreaty.

“I am well aware that you desire that. And, certainly, I have accepted your feelings.”

“Then!”

“However, what decides their fates in the end is not your thoughts but theirs.”

Saying that, the king took a step.

“Now then, what will you do? After the real Celiastina returns home, how does opening up a path together with me sound?”

At that question, the anti-saint faction members looked at each other’s faces. Ghada’s stern expression did not collapse.

“From here, I have been planning to create a system to monitor the saint and priests. –Naturally, the opposition from the priests will be strong. However, in light of the royal palace attack from you all this time, we can see that realizing it is not an impossible plan. The details still need to be worked out after this but, so long as there is a resolve, I would like to appoint several members from amongst you to that system.”

“–No way.”

Unable to stand this, Jin raised his voice.

“That can’t be anything more than a joke. It’s obvious that, not only the priests, but everyone in the royal palace would strongly oppose appointing the guys who attacked the royal palace to important positions of the country.”

“I suppose you cannot believe this either?”

The king had a deep smile.

“To be sure, it is quite outlandish. However, if you continue to practice what is established then nothing will change in the future. And I wish to change a lot. For this country.”

Asyut, who was still kneeling, looked up at the king standing beside him. His words had a power. That no matter how ridiculous the words were, if he said something would be realized then it would be realized without a doubt- that power made them think that.

“...Ghada...”

Someone from the anti-saint faction murmured that. Everyone looked at Ghada with uneasy eyes. His will, as the core of the anti-saint faction, would be their will like that.

Ghada slowly closed his eyes. And then he exhaled deeply, where even Asyut could see it.

“.....”

At last, he released the handle of the spear he was gripping. The dull sound of metal rolling on the ground burst through the area.

Ghada pursed his lips with a sullen expression.

“So, what’re you guys going to do.”

Siegcrest jerked his head and prompted the rest of them. Everyone was frozen, as if they were caught unguarded, and then once again looked at each other’s faces.

However that was only for a slight moment. Soon, one person threw away the long sword that they held. And then, seeing that, another person threw away their hoe. And, again, there was another person, and then another.

How much time had passed.

At last, when the last sword rolled onto the ground, their expressions distinctly showed their strong will. They had not given up, and they were not simply being drawn along by the flow. Like what the king and girl said, they were looking to the future and watching the fate of the saint.

“–First unit and second unit of the Order of Holy Knights.”

Vansaider, the commander who had watched over the situation without opening his mouth until now, raised a sharp voice.

“The mentioned two units will take these people to the detention center for the present. The remaining men will withdraw and look to their respective captains for instructions.”

He ordered that in a voice that carried well and faced Siegcrest and Asyut before giving a slight nod. After that, he gave a short bow to the king. The soldiers who received the

orders to withdraw started to leave rapidly and the stagnant air began to move once again.

(...Is it over?)

As Asyut helped Milifaire up, who still had her head down, he looked over the area once more. Celiastina entered his sight and he noticed her sending a smile to him.

Exhaustion was visible in her expression, but at the same time she looked refreshed.

With an elusive smile on those lips, she murmured something. Those words were erased by the surrounding noise. However, it came across to Asyut.

*"It's over, isn't it. Everything."*

He was certain she said that.

# Chapter Thirteen

The anti-saint faction's assault came to an end without seeing much blood.

It was clear to everyone that the greatest achievement lied with the king and Saint Celiastina. Around the count of two hundred soldiers in that spot witnessed everything and, among the surrounding residents who stayed at home without evacuating, there were a number of those who secretly watched the situation.

Certainly, it was all a problem born from Saint Celiastina's tyrannic behavior; however, with the present her, it was enough to believe in her once more. Those inside the royal palace began to think like that. In addition, even the general public who did not know the circumstances watched the sincere interactions of the king and saint with goodwill. Yes, their opinions did not drop as much as was expected.

Was this an unexpected reaction for the king?"

Asyut was walking through the corridor alone with a straight back.

He was on his way back after having gone to see the states of those in the anti-saint faction who were imprisoned in jail. A day had passed since then, and their punishment still hadn't been decided. In this unmoving situation, they were much calmer in jail than expected. They did not jeer upon seeing Asyut's figure, and they did not shout for Celiastina to be brought to them. Hearing the stories from the soldiers who were guarding them, they were impressed at how extremely quiet and obedient the prisoners were. Rather, it seems it was the ones who gave themselves up early on who were noisy about asking what would become of them.

Did they believe in the words of the king and Celiastina?

Celiastina, when she was facing the anti-saint faction, announced that she would like them to watch over the real "her" when she returned. And she entreated the king not to put them to death. The king also acknowledged that-.

But, in actuality, it was not that easy for them to escape capital punishment. There was the will of the saint and the words of the king himself. However, the priest faction did not approve of that. In turn, their voices grew loud with criticism spewed at the king

who bore the responsibility of allowing the royal palace to be assaulted by a small rebel army, and that there was point in arguing on how those who targeted the life of the saint should be put to death.

What to do from here? Asyut was saddled with that problem and was now on his way to the king.

The usual liveliness had completely returned to the royal palace's corridors.

The female servants, who had stood by in their homes, had already returned and now and then he could hear them laughing with each other. The tense air from yesterday could no longer be felt, and everything had become the same as always to the extent where the assault could be thought of as a dream.

But it was not a dream. Even now, problems were piled up like a mountain.

“Excuse me.”

Before the king's office, Asyut knocked on the door to the room and twisted the handle with familiar actions. Like the king's personal rooms, this door was uniquely made and would not budge if one were to just push it.

In the room the king was standing alone by the window. Normally, there should be one person at minimum waiting on him, but it seems he cleared out the people just now.

“Oh, Asyut, you came.”

The king showed a clear smile and raised one hand to welcome Asyut. He was offered a seat but Asyut chose to stand.

“You went to see the state of the anti-saint faction members, did you not. How were they?”

“Yes, nothing in particular has changed and they are quiet.”

“Is that so. And is your sister alright as well?”

Asyut nodded with a complicated heart. Milifaire was also passing the time in the same jail along with the others. There was a distinction between men and women, and the number of women in the prisons were less than ten. Still, it was certainly not a

comfortable place. For that reason, the royal palace proposed preparing a private room, but Milifaire refused that. Because Asyut understood her feelings, he accepted her intentions.

“Well, nothing can be done in this current situation. If your sister was treated specially, the one hurt would be none other than herself. Rather than keeping watch on that, the next move must be decided as quickly as possible.”

The king murmured that with a pensive expression. It was a pensive look, but there was no doubt that beneath that look his mind was already decided.

“You do not intend to put them to death. And that should not be impossible. This assault was settled better than expected and you and Lady Celiastina directly exchanged words on how “they will not be given the death penalty”. On top of that, there is a movement inside the royal palace to speak about the events of this time as a moving tale, and so is it not possible to crush the opposition of the priest faction.”

“That is correct. However, it is also a question of how much we can exempt the anti-saint faction.”

For an instant Asyut fell silent.

“...Being imprisoned for life would, legally, be enough.”

“But that is not an option. First of all, it is unrealistic to cover feeding as many as one hundred and fifty people in jail for decades. Furthermore, as I have already said, I intend to invite several people from them to the Inspection Committee to watch over the movements of the saint and the priests.”

“In regard to that, the plans are being refined at once and in secrecy. I will report again once the general framework has been completed.”

“Mm, I am relying on you. It would be best to be as quick as possible.”

“The priest faction is resisting more and more, aren’t they.”

“That’s right. Although those people who serve God will never do something such as take up swords and revolt.”

The king said something that was between a joke and not. Asyut sighed without

concealing it.

"Please do not make light of the priests too much. Even without taking up swords, it would be troubling if the discord were to deepen."

"I will keep that in mind. But, Asyut, I would like you to pay close attention to the movements of the priests in the future as well. They should also be more than aware enough of the position they are placed in. In the future, it may not be enough to simply voice objections."

Asyut nodded.

He recalled the words of the high-ranking priest, Roblin, that he passed just before the anti-saint faction's assault.

-We will protect the saint in our own way. Even if we remonstrate her, we cannot abandon her. To abandon the saint is to abandon our faith.

Even now he could remember that man's words clearly.

-Even if the king uses the saint as a convenient pawn, we will preserve her sanctity.

Roblin's calm demeanor, conversely, made him feel a bad premonition. What was the meaning of those words? When he saw the situation settle like this, he became all the more concerned.

"And, how is Lady Celiastina. Has she not waken yet?"

"...Yes."

It seemed the king was also reminded of Celiastina. Asyut nodded with a disheartened expression when he was asked that in a somewhat kind tone.

Yesterday, after the raid, Celiastina had watched motionlessly until the last person of the anti-saint faction was taken away by the army, and then she conveyed that she was not feeling well, and quickly withdrew to her own room. She simply wanted to sleep right now and, if she said that, there was no way they could drag her out forcibly from her room. After watching her sink deeply into the bed for a while and sleep as if she were dead, Asyut had left the room with reluctant feelings. He had asked her maid, Nasha, to report to him as soon as Celiastina woke but- there was still no report from

Nasha.

“King Ronbarno.”

Asyut called out his name anew. The king raised his eyebrows and looked at Asyut.

“About Lady Celiastina... the contents of what you said yesterday at that spot was undeniably true, wasn’t it.”

The current Celiastina was not the real Celiastina. She was a completely different person; a girl sent to fill the absence of the saint. And, eventually, a person who would disappear-

“You must think it is a preposterous story.”

That’s right, Asyut answered shortly.

“I think it’s preposterous. However, as you’ve said, I have also felt that for a long time.”

“So, you did notice.”

After he nodded, the king stared intently at Asyut.

“You’re quite calm.”

“Certainly not.”

Asyut lowered his eyes with a prompt reply.

“I can’t help but be terrified. In truth, I am even standing here full of anxiety. How long will she sleep? What if she won’t wake anymore? And even if she wakes...”

His voice grew hoarse and the end of his words disappeared.

Even if she woke...

“...I apologize deeply but please excuse me.”

Asyut raised his head, conveying only that, before he pivoted on his heels.

As he thought, he should stay by Celiastina's side.

He couldn't bring himself to act composed any longer. Such thoughts pushed Asyut's back strongly and he left the room, halfway to rushing out, to head towards Celiastina's room. All the while wishing, please, oh god, that "the last moment" she mentioned would not come.

It was right when Asyut, who was walking through the hallway with his shoes echoing loudly, was at a corner that he nearly collided with a small shape that leapt out from the other side. He heard a quiet scream of "Ah" and, when he looked down, it was the maid who attended to Celiastina, Nasha.

"Nasha, what's wrong."

"Lord A-Asyut!"

The pale face that looked up at Asyut was flushed slightly because she ran. Seeing how the maid appeared relieved, Asyut's heartbeat quickened all at once.

"Oh, I'm glad to see you. Lady Celiastina is—"

"Lady Celiastina is!?"

When he unconsciously grabbed both her shoulders tightly, Nasha managed to answer with eyes darting from surprise.

"She has woken and looks healthy! She said she'd like to see you, Lord Asyut."

Oh, he felt a tension release from his whole body. So, she finally woke up. And she said she wanted to see him—.

"Thanks."

He couldn't continue to walk slowly anymore. Asyut ran down the long hallway at full speed.

Celiastina was sitting in the bed in her room.

Her neck was turned to gaze out of the window that was a slight distance from her bed. When she noticed that Asyut finally arrived at her room, she slowly turned to him. Her expression- felt, for some reason, somewhat different from usual.

“Asyut, so you came.”

Saying that, she gave a small smile and, as he thought, something was different somewhere.

“Lady Celiastina?”

Calling out that name he walked up to her and her smile deepened. It must be his imagination. There was nothing unusual.

“How are you feeling.”

“Mm, I’m fine already. I slept all day so I’m feeling healthy.”

Celiastina said that and tried to get out of her bed. Asyut hurriedly stopped her.

“Please continue to lie down. You must be tired from yesterday and today’s events.”

“I’m fine. I was thinking of getting some outside air.”

“Let me open the window.”

Asyut approached the window with a long stride while waving Celiastina off with a hand. The time was past mid-noon and the sunlight through the window was warm. The clear weather that had continued for the past several days was unchanged today as well.

“That’s a nice wind.”

Celiastina raised a happy voice to the breeze that came in from the gap of the window.

Looking back with his hands on the window still, Asyut stared hard at her. Celiastina, who noticed Asyut’s gaze, tilted her head with a troubled look.

“Asyut, what’s wrong?”

“...Lately, I’ve been thinking long and hard on this.”

And then Asyut walked up to Celiastina’s side once again.

“What exactly are you? What kind of existence did you have originally?”

Celiastina looked up at Asyut with unreadable eyes.

“Won’t you please tell me. Yesterday, you clearly spoke of how you were “not Celiastina”. Then, who exactly are you? You said the answer to that was not important, but... it is extremely important to me. I want to know about you, by all means.”

When Asyut’s feet stopped at her bedside, he stared down at Celiastina without looking away.

“Even when I’m by your side, and even when I exchanged words with you, it is frustrating how I am not really touching you.”

“Asyut.”

“I love you.”

Asyut informed her plainly. Celiastina’s purple eyes wavered slightly.

—Ah, he finally told her.

He came all this way without managing to tell her those few words. He hated her but, unnoticed, he was drawn to her. He was bewildered by himself and, again, he wavered.

Asyut thought about how he came quite a long way. He also felt like he should have told her this earlier. But he probably needed time for himself.

“Asyut, I—“

“I know, that you are rejecting my feelings. But, no more. Please, hold nothing back and tell me everything that you are thinking.”

Celiastina closed her mouth again. She was at a loss. However, Asyut also could not pull back. He was confident that, if he were to avert his eyes from her now, he would lose something important.

“Lady Celiastina.”

Once more, he called that name firmly. She closed her eyes and did not move like that for a while. Asyut continued to wait patiently. For her to open her mouth and talk about everything.

“Asyut.”

“Yes?”

“You see, I saw a strange dream.”

“...A dream?”

Yes, Celiastina said and continued on with her eyes closed.

“I was standing alone in a pure white world. There was no one there except for me. But, in the dream, I was very calm. Ah, I understood that I came here again.”

Asyut was driven by an inexplicable uneasiness as he made acknowledging noises. However, Celiastina herself had an air of composure.

“I walked for a while. Although, because it was a white world, I didn’t even know if I was moving forward or not. Anyway, I thought I would try and walk and moved my feet. And then I saw a person standing in the distance.”

Celiastina opened her eyes again at that point and looked up at the ceiling as if she was imagining that scene of her dream.

“I was relieved that they were there, like I thought they’d be. After all, that person was in that world the last time I came there, so I was sure they’d be there somewhere again.”

“...That person was?”

“Celiastina.”

She said that name in a gentle tone.

“It was Celiastina’s figure. She was looking down a little, so I couldn’t see her face well.

But, you know, I could see a little of her face this time, when I couldn't see it at all the last time we met. I thought she had a very calm expression. That's why I was glad and relieved from the bottom of my heart."

"...What did she say?"

"We didn't say any words. Before I could speak, I felt a sensation like my body was being pulled... and then, before I knew it, I woke up on this bed."

And then she stroked the bed sheets with a pale hand, as if she were saying the story about her dream ended here.

"-Asyut."

"Yes."

Celiastina turned her eyes towards Asyut again.

"I have one request. Won't you come with me to the infirmary?"

"The infirmary?"

Asyut reflexively asked again. An unexpected place jumped out from her mouth and he was slightly perplexed. However, if that was what Celiastina wished then Asyut nodded.

"But is your body well enough?"

"I'm fine, I was only sleeping. I want to go and see the asiatic jasmine planted in the infirmary."

This time he supported Celiastina, who had gotten down from her bed, and then Asyut placed the stole that was prepared beside him on her shoulders.

"Thank you."

The asiatic jasmine of the infirmary. Asyut had also heard things regarding this. That it was a plant that Celiastina carefully nurtured. And that, under the divine protection of the saint, it seemed to continue to grow at an abnormal speed-. Asyut had also thought about wanting to see its state together with her at the infirmary once, but

since he had been too busy lately it had been left like that. If Celiastina said she wanted to see it together then it was welcome news.

But the uncomfortable feeling he felt upon his first glance of her remained. He could not help but feel a vague apprehension. Asyut did not allow his disturbance to be sensed and followed after Celiastina silently.

When they visited the infirmary, Mislee welcomed the two of them with great delight.

Lord Asyut, you've finally come, haven't you, she said with a wide smile. Celiastina stopped Mislee who tried to prepare tea for them immediately and the two of them went out to the back yard.

Coming out into the garden, he noticed that the sun had started to set and the sky was dyed a faint red. In the midst of that, a single tree stretched up towards the sun in a pleased way. Behind that were lush green vines. Several things white like snow were entangled in the vine, but those seemed to be flower buds.

"It's impressive."

Asyut called out from behind Celiastina, who was staring at the plant seriously. Celiastina nodded while still staring at the asiatic jasmine.

"I'm happy that it's growing smoothly. Since it's like my double."

"...Double, you said?"

Celiastina nodded again and turned to Asyut.

"I think I'm going to disappear soon."

"\_"

"It's like I said during the battle with the anti-saint faction. I'm someone who will disappear when the real Celiastina returns. Because I was just a momentary being sent to serve as her replacement while her soul was resting."

"That's."

Asyut couldn't find his words.

"Everything the king said is the truth. Celiastina tried to take her own life once. But that wasn't allowed. Whether it was the will of God, or the will of something completely different... even I don't know. I was only told by "it" that Celiastina would come back in about a year, at longest."

A year. Asyut looked back roughly at the past. The beginning had been the events at that valley. From there... time had passed to the point where it wouldn't be strange for it to have been a year.

"I am... Originally, I was an ordinary girl living in a town. But..."

Celiastina hesitated and her words cut off.

"But... there was an accident and I lost my life."

A shudder ran through Asyut's entire body. Unmoving, he only stared at the girl in front of him.

"In truth, I shouldn't be in this world anymore. This one year was also a period of grace bestowed to me. Anyway, until Celiastina returned, I thought I'd try to make this royal palace a little easier for her to live in. So that Celiastina could think to try her best again once more, that's what I told myself I was here for."

But that wasn't all, Celiastina said that and nodded to herself.

"In less than a year, I experienced many things. I learned a lot about a world I'm sure I'd never be able to know about in my whole life as long as I was just a town girl. I came into contact with a lot of people and realized what it meant to live."

Celiastina held up her own hand over her head. It was a pale hand, so pale it seemed translucent to the sunlight.

"To live isn't just to breathe. It's something more precious and the fact that I can think this from the bottom of my heart is because of this year."

Asyut tried to call her name but stopped. He pressed his lips together tightly and kept watching that figure who was all too ephemeral. Celiastina quietly lowered her hand and turned her face to Asyut again.

“But I was afraid of being drawn to you, Asyut. Even though I knew a separation would come one day, these feelings I couldn’t stop were- terrifying. I was happy when you gradually began to relax and open up to me, but I was also really afraid.”

The words “scary” were repeatedly said by Celiastina’s mouth. Slowly, carefully, as if she were testing out that feeling.

“There were a lot of scary things. The most was... that I’d die again, I guess. In the end, that really is terrifying. But, I wonder why, right in this moment, I don’t feel scared at all.”

There Celiastina suddenly smiled.

“Why’s that, huh. Even I find it very strange. Even though I know I don’t have time anymore, my feelings are this calm.”

“...What can I do to stop you?”

Celiastina shook her head slowly.

“That’s the only thing you can’t do. There’s no other way. Actually, I shouldn’t have been able to meet you like this, Asyut.”

This was an irreplaceable miracle- is what she meant.

“That’s why I have to be thankful for meeting you and everyone, Asyut.”

“But.”

Asyut searched for some kind of objection with difficulty. It felt like, if he accepted this, she would disappear in that moment.

“To me, this is the beginning. I met you and it’s started at last- everything of me.”

“Yes.”

Celiastina stretched out a hand and touched Asyut’s cheek. The sensation of her fingertips were cool but it did not calm Asyut’s heart.

“Asyut, your road will continue onwards from here. And I want you to walk straight

forward on it. For me too."

He didn't want those words.

Asyut shook his head sluggishly.

"If you disappear, I wouldn't be able to walk. I'll slip back into a world of darkness again."

"No you won't, Asyut."

A gentle and soft fragrance brushed Asyut's nose. The moment he thought that, he was embraced tenderly. Celiastina, who wrapped her arms around Asyut's back, buried her face in his chest.

"I can feel your heartbeat, Asyut. You're alive. That's why you can walk on."

"If that's the case, aren't you alive like this right now?"

"You're mistaken. The one breathing like this and living like this is "Celiastina". I can tell now that Celiastina's consciousness is right beside me."

-Ah, why was it like this.

Even though her body was this soft and this warm. The heartbeat from her chest also came across firmly. The strength of her arms around his back and the tight grip of her hands on his clothes too. Her hair was even tickling his cheeks, fluttering in the wind and setting adrift a floral fragrance. Even the weight of her head against his chest—even though he was feeling her presence with his entire body and soul.

But at the same time, Asyut also started to feel that there was something being lost at the edges.

"Asyut."

Celiastina called out that name once again.

"Thank you. I'm really glad I met you, Asyut. I was really happy in this one year."

"Celi..."

Asyut dropped his gaze to what was in his arms. Celiastina's eyes were closed comfortably. No, she needed to open her eyes right now. Asyut's body froze in terror, but she continued to keep her eyes closed and only showed a gentle smile.

"Thank you so much... thank you..."

As if saying "thank you" countless of times wasn't enough, Celiastina continued to murmur that.

Gradually, the strength left from her body.

From the arms holding Asyut and the feet standing on the ground too. She tilted and began to collapse.

"LADY CELIASTINA!"

Even Asyut's scream no longer brought a reaction.

Holding Celiastina's body which was limp without energy, Asyut kneeled on the spot.

Celiastina was sleeping along together with faint breaths. It wasn't that she died. However, she wasn't simply asleep either. Asyut had no reasons, but he was convinced.

That, just now, her existence had disappeared-.

At that instant.

Asyut felt the air in the area begin to stir.

Following that, there was a strange floating feeling like something from the depths of his body was being lifted. Asyut unconsciously tightened his arms around Celiastina and lifted his head.

The wind blew.

The tree leaves shook and rustled.

What in the world- some kind of overwhelming power dominated the area, to the point where he could not even raise his voice. Trying to find its identity, Asyut looked around the area.

And then the asiatic jasmine caught his eyes.

It was too sudden.

The plant, that had its young vines fluttering in the wind, abruptly began to stretch towards the sky.

“Wha.”

Once he saw its movement, the rest happened in a flash. The vine began to grow at a rapid speed and spread to all sides, covering the wall of the building all at once. Asyut could only watch it like that, stunned. Before long, the slightly dull white wall was dyed in the green of leaves.

That wasn't all. The plant, which covered the entire wall, began to bud this time at the same speed. –No. The moment it budded, in the next instant it blossomed. Lovely pale pink flowers, one, two, three... they blossomed at a speed he couldn't count anymore.

“W-What's happening?”

Mislee seemed to notice an inexplicable presence in the back yard and peeked her head out hesitantly. And then her eyes popped wide, almost to the point of falling out, at the sight that was spread out in front of her.

“Oh, oh my, huh!?”

Hearing Mislee's disconcerted voice, other patients also appeared. And then, like Mislee, they stood rigidly straight with their mouths open.

After that, a stillness returned. It didn't take a long time.

In no time the wall was covered flowers to the extent where a person could mistake it for a pale pink waterfall. Every time a breeze blew, the flowers swayed and a faintly sweet scent drifted in the area.

“Am... Amazing...”

In the utterly silent back yard, Mislee murmured this in a daze.

“Is this real life? I’m not dreaming, right?”

Her line of sight remained fixed on the stunning waterfall of asiatic jasmine.

“It’s a miracle.”

Someone muttered.

“It must be the saint’s miracle.”

At that voice, everyone in the area sent their gaze to Celiastina. Finally noticing her figure in Asyut’s arms with her eyes closed, everyone lost their words again.

Asyut remained unmoving like that.

The last miracle she brought- However, he didn’t wish for that.

All he wanted was for her to just stay by his side.

That would have been enough.

Asyut bit his lip and looked up at the asiatic jasmine which calmly fluttered in the wind for a very long time.

# Chapter Fourteen

Three days passed.

Celiastina continued to sleep on.

Perhaps it was because she had been seen sleeping often lately that, at first, the people around did not think much of this. The doctor's diagnosis did not point out any problems in particular and so it was thought she would wake in a day this time as well.

However, to their regret, the days this time were too long. Now that three days had passed without her waking, everyone began to feel a sense of danger and could not view this problem optimistically. A specialized medical team was created to quickly explain the cause and what exactly happened to her body.

But it was likely no one would be able to find out the cause-.

For Asyut these three days were exceedingly hectic.

Firstly, he was moving around for the establishment of an inspection body that would monitor the saint as well as the priests. Asyut, as the First Holy Knight, had considerable involvement with the priest faction. And so it was expected, on that point, that he would be entrusted with coordinating with them. His surroundings sympathized with him for being pushed with an unfavorable role, but Asyut himself didn't particularly mind. It was best for difficult problems to continue without giving him time to rest- so that he couldn't think about anything else, such as other things.

Secondly, he made preparations for the release of the anti-saint faction members who were caught these past few days.

Yes, they were expected to be released soon.

That was because a pardon from the king was officially announced. The king, who planned to incorporate the main members of the anti-saint faction into inspectors, showed Asyut and his nearest subordinates that from the start he had intentions of

wanting to release those underground members. However, the priest faction opposed greatly, as was expected; but even if they did not, visible disapproval was shown through the royal palace at how an acquittal was going too far. And so it became that the decision was postponed.

The “miracle” that Celiastina caused took part in putting that to effect.

The plant she raised matured in an instant and bloomed splendid flowers-.

It was regarded as a miracle that occurred because Celiastina was saddened at the anti-saint faction’s assault and wished that the suffering would not continue any more. The asiatic jasmine also grew in a place where anyone could enter and so there were endless visitors from morning to night. This story also spread quickly and the following day of the “miracle” it became well-known through the royal palace.

Once it became like that, it was undoubtedly extremely easy for the king to use. If it was a “miracle”, then it wouldn’t follow that his intentions were to weaken the authority of the saint and priest, but if he were to establish an inspecting body with success instead, then it would be thought of as a good thing.

But even that didn’t mean anything to Asyut.

Although Asyut was assailed somewhat by vertigo, he shook his head lightly and dropped his eyes again to the documents at hand.

This was a conference room in one corner of the royal palace. There were ten chairs surrounding a square desk- presently, apart from Asyut, none of the seats were filled yet.

Another meeting was to start again. It was to be a discussion about dealing with the anti-saint faction members after they were released. Of course, they would return to their original lives but there were questions as to whether they would be monitored for a period of time, if so how long that would be, and on what scale. To begin with, in the case that understanding could not be gained from their surroundings, how would they be integrated into their original lives- would support be necessary and, again considering public opinion, would that even be possible. Issues were piled as high as mountains.

“Your complexion seems quite bad, are you alright?”

It was Linus that called out to Asyut who was absorbed in thought. It was planned for him to attend this meeting as well as the saint's guardian and he sat beside Asyut without warning.

“Lately, you seem to be moving as if possessed by something. If you continue to push yourself, you will collapse before long.”

For Asyut right now, it was the most annoying thing to have that pointed out. Leave me alone, normally he'd spit that out only in his mind but...

“And you seem to be looking unusually well. Those gentlemen are about to return soon though, so are you anxiously awaiting them?”

“Oh my, it's rare to hear your sarcasm. Have you been run down at last?”

Linus showed a calm smile.

“In actuality, I can hardly keep a carefree mind such as anxiously awaiting them. We still do not know if Celiastina will really awaken, and if the previous personality is to return then... things will become difficult.”

While speaking, Linus took a glass of water that was prepared on the tabletop and drank a sip.

“Besides, even I unexpectedly liked “that girl”. If she won't return anymore, isn't that a sad event?”

Asyut looked at Linus' expression from the corner of his eye and did not respond. – Sad, or something like that. If things could be settled with that word, then there wouldn't be any problems, would there.

“In any case, it seems there is still much to come after this. Don't push yourself too hard, and take care of yourself properly. Or you won't be able to act if anything were to happen in the future.”

Linus said that and then dropped his eyes to the documents of the material as well and fell silent. His advice was so horribly common that there was no doubt he said it on purpose, knowing Asyut would not appreciate it.

Aah, he didn't want to think, he couldn't think. He hoped the meeting would start soon.

Asyut dismissed Linus' words from his head and tried to concentrate only on the materials in front of him.

In these three days since Celiastina fell asleep, there were people who felt her "absence" no less than Asyut.

There was the maid, Nasha.

Nasha was terribly scared by how Celiastina continued sleeping for three days and, furthermore, she was sensitive in feeling that something about Celiastina's appearance was different. By nature, Celiastina was a thin woman but she became gaunt in these three days. Whenever Asyut came to her room to see her, Nasha was usually standing there first. Moreover, she was there regardless of whether it was morning or night.

He was certain he looked like this at her side too. And that's why Nasha's suffering was painfully conveyed to Asyut. Still, nothing could be done. If anything could be done, he wanted someone to tell him how to do it.

Aeneas conducted himself without any changes from his usual self but his heart must not have been calm. In addition to actively participating in training as a squire, he also seemed to be putting excessive effort into independent training. A superior officer spilled that it was as if Aeneas was trying to hurt his own body.

Those who surrounded Celiastina started to become exhausted little by little.

Asyut wondered if she knew this in the end. How much of an irreplaceable existence she was to someone.

Night arrived again.

Once tomorrow came, the time without Celiastina would continue to accumulate.

And just how much accumulated time would he have to look up at. Asyut stared at the waning moon from the window, thinking this.

When Asyut received the message that Celiastina woke up, he was in the middle of training and crossing blades with Siegcrest. Siegcrest had been unable to watch Asyut remain glued to his desk from morning to night and so dragged him, half by force, to the training grounds.

The one who brought the news was Aeneas.

His expression at the entrance of the training grounds, when he informed them that Celiastina woke up, was terribly tense. Even Siegcrest who knew nothing about the circumstances furrowed his brows at Aeneas' unnatural appearance.

"It seems she woke about an hour ago. Although her maid, Nasha, was there she was told to call Lord Linus and several priests and seemed to have left the room. Just a moment ago, Lord Linus and the others were meeting with Lady Celiastina."

"...Did you meet Lady Celiastina?"

"No, I... it appears that Lady Celiastina herself does not wish to meet with many people."

Answering that, Aeneas behaved as if he were wary of something rather than being disappointed. His nervousness came across. Asyut felt the sword he was holding grow damp with sweat.

"Did Nasha say anything?"

Aeneas shook his head again.

"Nothing. However, she had a very grim expression. I wonder what exactly happened..."

Asyut closed his eyes tightly and took several deep breaths. He knew already. He knew. And yet he was terrified- to the extent where it felt like his knees would shake.

He would meet her.

However, in contrast to Asyut's mind, Aeneas' words pierced him without mercy.

"I came in a hurry to inform you of a message. -Lady Celiastina wishes to meet with Lord Asyut."

“...I see.”

Of course, avoiding this wouldn’t be allowed. He... knew that.

“If she’s awake, isn’t that a good thing.”

Siegcrest opened his mouth while he sheathed his sword. But his expression was not as hopeful as the contents of his words.

“I dunno what happened, but if she kept on sleeping like this then it’d put her life in danger.”

“...Yeah.”

At Asyut’s evasive answer, Siegcrest pushed him in the back.

“Hey, what’s with you being like that. Put some more spirit in!”

Asyut knew that was his way of encouragement and so he nodded firmly, while still being at a loss. Yes, if he was nervous at this situation, then who in the world would be able to face her directly. Asyut told himself this somehow and also put his sword in its sheath.

“I will... speak with her.”

He didn’t know what awaited him. But he was certain only that he could not run away.

He had never felt that the corridor to Celiastina’s rooms were this steep.

Until now, he had always been made to worry about her. He had never thought this distance was “pleasurable” but only this time it was not even comparable.

His footsteps became heavier the more the distance shrunk. It felt like he was going deeply into a maze with no light. He even felt like turning back and retracing his steps immediately but- he couldn’t do that.

He had to see Celiastina.

Asyut arrived in front of the room and, raising his right hand to knock, he was unable to move like that for a while. He could not explain the reason why or anything like that. Only, he couldn't move his body no matter what. His whole body was rejecting the being that should be beyond this door.

“.....”

An unpleasant sweat appeared on his forehead. His throat was painfully dry.

Nevertheless, Asyut managed to rouse himself somehow. He clenched his raised fist tightly once and then knocked on the door with resolve. A light sound echoed, at odds with Asyut's desperate resolution.

It was silent beyond the door for a while. But even that was just for a slight moment. Soon, a delicate female voice came back.

“—Come in.”

It was undoubtedly the girl he had grown used to hearing this past year. Even though it had only been three days, it was a voice he felt like he hadn't heard for decades. However, at the same time, it was also the voice that thrust him down to the depths of despair in the past.

“Excuse my intrusion.”

Asyut answered with a tense voice and opened the door.

In that instant, a slight breeze passed through. Unable to allow himself to be comforted by that, Asyut unconsciously looked around the room.

Nothing had changed. It was the exact same room as when he came in the morning today. It wasn't like he stepped into an unknown world, Asyut told himself this.

The bed was empty. Instead, the person he was looking for was standing just beside the terrace. As he stared at that long golden hair which swayed a little, Asyut stood still at the entrance.

She turned around slowly. And those violet eyes, with no mirkiness, looked directly at Asyut.

Nothing had changed—yes, that's what he saw. However, it was certain that something was different. Asyut also stared at her eyes and pressed his lips tightly together. So that he wouldn't run, so that he wouldn't scream. In any case, he was just that frantic.

“...It has been a long time, Lord Asyut.”

Celiastina broke the ice with a quiet tone.

That was the decisive blow for Asyut. He was dizzy with vertigo, like his head had been smashed by a blunt impact. Just how peaceful would he be if he collapsed like this and let go of his consciousness.

“You are...”

“I am the original Celiastina. The former saint who drowned in madness, unlike the girl who conversed with you a few days ago.”

“.....”

Celiastina's eyes were calm. The shadow of madness she showed in her last moments in the past were completely hidden. It was also different from the time Celiastina first arrived at the royal palace. It was much calmer and, if he had to say, it made one feel an enlightened atmosphere.

—I can tell that Celiastina's consciousness is right beside me.

Those words were brought back to Asyut's mind. He wondered if, exactly like those words, Celiastina had watched over everything by the side of the girl who was her substitute for the past year.

“I have... returned.”

Celiastina murmured that and he finally noticed she was gripping something in her pale hands. When she opened her hands gently, there on her palms was a single ribbon.

“I'm back...”

And then Celiastina gripped the ribbon once again and, as if offering up a prayer, she brought both hands to her face. That entire chain of motion was so fleetingly beautiful

that Asyut was involuntarily entranced.

“Lord Asyut.”

After some time, Celiastina raised her head again. It was a gaze that “she” showed for the first time and made him feel her strong will.

“I would like to go and save that girl.”

Asyut could not comprehend those decisively said words.

“That girl— my friend named Yuna.”

“Yuna...?”

It couldn’t be.

Asyut’s heart began to beat fast like an alarm.

Save... Yuna?

“What do you mean—“

“Excuse us.”

Their conversation was suddenly ended there.

When he quickly turned around, there were several men wearing black priest robes who were entering the room without reservation. Noticing their dreadful expressions, Asyut protected Celiastina behind him at once.

“What is going on.”

Asyut responded with a firm attitude, but his opponents threw him a sharp glare with no timidity.

“Lord Asyut, we would ask of you to step aside from there.”

“Before that, how about you answer my question.”

The priests looked at each other before giving a small nod.

“We came here in order to protect Lady Celiastina.”

“What...?”

“In this place, covered in earthly life, Lady Celiastina cannot maintain her peace. In light of all the events that have occurred up to now, it is as clear as day. Therefore, us priests will protect her in your place. That is the will of God.”

Asyut looked back long and hard at them, unable to understand them. No matter how he saw this, he could only think they were here to harm Celiastina. That was how severe their expressions were. How did they intend to protect her with that?

However, at the appearance of a new priest there, Asyut was finally able to understand a part of the situation.

—Roblin. A senior priest who held a high position even among those who assumed priesthood.

He came into the room with a heavy gait.

“Lord Roblin! What is the meaning of this.”

“So it is Lord Asyut.”

Robling gave Asyut a single glance.

“You have shown up early. I thought Lady Celiastina would still be alone.”

And then Roblin turned his eyes to Celiastina, who was protected behind Asyut, and reverently bowed his head.

“Lady Celiastina, I sincerely apologize for this disorderly situation. However, everything is for the sake of protecting you, Lady Celiastina. I ask for your patience for a short while more.”

“Lord Roblin, I demand an explanation!”

Asyut called out that name again with irritation and Roblin raised his upper body to glare at Asyut with cold eyes.

“As I have said, we will protect Lady Celiastina in our own way.”

“What relation does that have with these actions.”

“We would like to move Lady Celiastina out of these rooms and to the Priest Tower.”

Asyut’s breath caught at Roblin’s declaration.

The Priest Tower. It was a white tower that stood looming over the surroundings in the northeastern part of the royal palace, and acted as the foundation of the collective life of the priests.

That tower, which was built as a community that was closed to everyone other than priests, exceedingly disliked the comings and goings of anyone except those who served God. Even the king was not an exception and was not allowed to enter without permissions or a legitimate reason. And, conversely, the priests rarely left their tower. Only high-ranking priests that were involved in the affairs of state were not like that—and one of those was Roblin.

So they were going to take Celiastina to that tower.

“There is no way such selfish actions will be recognized.”

It can only be said that they lost their minds. But Roblin appeared quite calm.

“It is regrettable that you would slander our actions as selfishness. To begin with, Lady Celiastina is someone who belongs originally to the side of us priests. It is your side that dishonors her by pulling her about and around for ceremonies and such things. Yes, it was a mistake from the start. Lady Celiastina is to be together with us and that is naturally the right path.”

“That is just an arbitrary explanation.”

Asyut raised his voice without hesitation, but Roblin snorted at him.

“You may take it as you wish. In any case, we cannot endure this any longer. How can we kneel to a king who treats us and the saint as tools? Lord Asyut, I see you as someone with some value. Please do not disappoint me. Be silent and allow us through.”

With those words as a start, the priests once again approached in Asyut’s direction. No, not Asyut’s direction, their target was the one person behind him, Celiastina.

“Will you not stop!”

It was a situation of five against one. Moreover, if his opponents were priests then even Asyut could not treat them roughly. It took all he had to just ward off a priest’s hand when they tried to grab Celiastina’s arm.

(Shit.)

He reached for his sword unconsciously. But the one who held him back was none other than Celiastina.

“Please calm down, Lord Asyut. If you point a blade at the priests, things will become unnecessarily complicated.”

Asyut managed to give up on his plan somehow at that composed whisper. –Aah, his head was heavy and he couldn’t make calm decisions. Asyut grinded his back teeth.

“Let’s do as they say for now. Another path is sure to open.”

Celiastina said that and then proceeded to step in front of the priests herself. Roblin’s complicated expression did not break down, but he nodded and turned on his heel. And Celiastina and the other priests followed after him. Asyut could only watch over the proceedings in a daze and without any strength.

What did this mean.

It was all incomprehensible. Too many things happened all at once and Asyut’s mind was in complete chaos.

Celiastina’s back rapidly became smaller and smaller. Like this she was leaving him and, no matter who it was inside her, it was still a sight that gouged at his heart in the end. He had the impulse even now to chase them down and take her back.

However, upon taking her back, it wouldn't be the person he sought to return-.

*"I would like to go and save that girl. That girl- my friend named Yuna."*

Celiastina's words echoed in his mind once again.

"Yuna."

Asyut tried saying that name.

It was an unfamiliar name. However, it was surely the person he needed now more than anything else.

He wondered if he could save her.

How?

He didn't know. He didn't know but-.

Asyut felt that the flame which had disappeared in his chest was burning once more.

If there was hope, even just a little bit, then...

He wouldn't give up.

Asyut decided strongly that he would try doing whatever it would take.

# Afterword

Hello, long time no see. Or, perhaps, it's nice to meet you for the first time.

Thanks to you, this story was able to welcome its third volume.

I am truly happy for this book to be in your hands like this again!

In this volume, the heroine herself, and the environment surrounding our heroine, has developed greatly. As the author, I am deeply moved to have finally gotten here. The number of characters has also greatly increased, each one proceeding with their own path, and it was a lot of hard work to put it all together around that.

But Yuna has been working hard as usual and I feel like even Asyut has become a passionate man (LOL). I had a lot of fun writing this work as well (though I had a lot of nightmares as well). I would be pleased if everyone enjoyed it too.

In the next volume, I also have to put in my spirit again and work hard! Although, saying that, the next version of "Light Beyond" which was published at the same time has progressed to greeting the ending one step ahead in the contents of this third volume. While the individual scenes are different, the book version and net version is generally the same, but finally they are heading in completely different directions. Although the conclusion is decided, it is an unknown world to me as well. I think I would like to focus on parts that the net version couldn't delve into, so I'd be grateful if everyone continued to join me with this.

...Oh my, before I knew it, this has become a sales promotion afterword for the next volume, so I'll end it here.

Lastly.

Thank you very much to Mr. Kishida Mel for drawing the beautiful illustrations this time as well. It's become a daily routine to stare at these illustrations, immersed in

pleasure, to the point where I'm surprised a hole hasn't opened up once a day. And thank you very much to my editor, Mr. Y, for working hard to pull my weak-minded self up to the publication of this third volume. Though you might be exhausted from pulling me up to the point where both of your arms have sore muscles... I-I will be diligent! And then, and then, thank you very much to all the people who took part in the publication of the third volume. And I thank you, who is holding this book right now, from the bottom of my heart.

Well then, I hope I can meet everyone next time in the fourth volume of "Light Beyond".

2010 November.

# Character Page

アシュート

第一神聖騎士にして、聖女シェリア  
ステイーナの婚約者。憎んでいたは  
ずの聖女に惹かれる自分に戸惑う。

シェリアステイーナ  
(ユーナ)

自殺団ったシェリアステイーナの命を繋ぎ  
とめるため、1年間の期限付きで、ユーナ  
の魂が身体に入っている。



ロノ

謎の好々爺。王宮のこと  
に詳しいようだが……。

イーニアス

シェリアスティーナの護衛。ユーナ  
の魂が入っていることを知らず、  
シェリアスティーナを慕っている。

ナシャ

明るく元気なシェリア  
スティーナの侍女。

ミリファーレ

アシュートの妹。行方  
知れずだつたが……。

## **Asyut [アシュート]**

The First Holy Knight who is the Saint Celiastina's fiancé. He is bewildered at himself for being drawn to the saint whom he should hate.

## **Celiastina (Yuna) [シェリアスティーナ (ユーナ) ]**

In order to tether the life of Celiastina, who attempted suicide, Yuna's soul entered this body for the period of a year.

## **Ron [ロン]**

A mysterious good-natured old man. He seems to be well-informed about the royal palace...

## **Aeneas [イーニアス]**

Celiastina's bodyguard. He dearly loves Celiastina, not knowing that Yuna's soul has entered her body.

## **Nasha [ナシャ]**

A bright and energetic maid of Celiastina.

## **Milifaire [ミリファーレ]**

Asyut's younger sister. Her whereabouts are unknown but...



PtFF by: traktorA7EN